



# Sierra County

## Historical Society

*Member of California Conference of Historical Societies*

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Vol. XV, No. 2

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Winter 1987

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### EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF A SIERRA COUNTY SCHOOL TEACHING PRINCIPAL

James J. Sinnott, who for thirty-three years was a teaching principal in the schools of Sierra County and for six years the County Superintendent of Schools of the County, was born in Downieville in 1907. He has a twin sister, Mrs. Bertha Reed, of Downieville. Both have lived in the home in which they were born, a residence which was built in 1854 and which has been the home of members of the Sinnott family since 1864. The maternal and paternal grandparents of Mr. Sinnott were in the Downieville area as early as 1865.

Mr. Sinnott attended the elementary schools of Downieville, and graduated from Downieville High School in 1925. The high school that year consisted of a senior class of four, a student body of twelve, and a teaching staff of one. High school graduations in those years were held at Loyalton, the high school at Loyalton being the mother school of the other high schools of the school district. The designated branch high schools were at Downieville, Sierraville and Sierra City. The name of the high school district was the Sierra Valley Joint Union High School District, a district which existed as such from its organization in 1908 into the 1950s



James J. Sinnott — 1947 Echo

when there was a reorganization of the school districts of the county and the title became what it is now, the Sierra Plumas Joint Unified School District.

Following graduation from Downieville High School, Mr. Sinnott enrolled at St. Mary's College in Oakland and graduated from that college in 1929 with a degree of Bachelor of Science in Commerce. In the Fall of 1929 he enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley where a year of study resulted in his earning a General Secondary Teaching Credential which authorized him to teach in the schools of California from elementary grades through junior colleges.

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### SPECIAL NOTICE

The next Historical Society meeting will be held at the home of our president, Bill Copren, in Sattley, December 13, 1987 at 1:00 p.m. Location: first house east, 1/3 of a mile north of Highways #89 and #49. It's a Potluck!

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His first work as a teaching principal was at Sierraville High School where he remained for four years. Subsequent teaching or teaching-principal experiences were at: Loyalton High School, three years; Forest City and Alleghany High School, five years; and Downieville High and Elementary School, twenty-one years.

In 1939 Mr. Sinnott took a leave of absence for a year from his duties as teaching principal at Downieville High School and enrolled for graduate work at the University of California at Berkeley, resulting in his earning a School Administration Credential and a Masters Degree in Economics.

In 1964, just a few years before his retirement from work in the field of education, Mr. Sinnott began the work of researching materials in preparation for the writing of a series of books on the history of Sierra County, a work which for the first time constituted a complete history of the County. From December 1972, until 1978, he has published twelve titles, some of which have seen second and third editions.

Books of the series include: Volume I: Downieville, Gold Town on the Yuba; Volume II: Sierra City and Goodyears Bar; Volume III: Alleghany and Forest City, Treasure Towns; Volume IV: Sierra Valley, Jewel of the Sierras; Volume V: Over North in Sierra County; and Volume VI: A General History of Sierra County. A total of about twelve thousand books have been sold, including many sales to public and school libraries.

In addition to his books on the history of Sierra County, Mr. Sinnott has prepared manuscripts on "Some Problems in the Philosophy of Physical Science" and on "The Making of a Violin". With reference to the latter, he began teaching wood shop at Loyalton High School in 1935 and began the hobby of making violins. Since that time a total of about thirty violins have been made.

Jim looks back upon the many years of his work in the schools of the County with a great deal of pleasure. He treasures the many valued remembrances of his associations with the personnel of the schools of the County.

(Editor's Note: In one of our past issues, we told the history of some of the local schools. I felt it would be interesting to hear from some of the teacher/administrators who were part of the early school system. Their dedication is heartwarming.)

## SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The 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, is affiliated with the Loyalton Museum, holds quarterly meetings, publishes a newsletter, and conducts historical research. Members are sent notices of society activities, receive the newsletter and are admitted free of charge to the Kentucky Mine Museum and Stamp Mill tour.

At the November 1986 general meeting the members voted to have dues payable the first of each year.

If you would like to become involved in the Historical Society's activities, or would just like to give your support, please join.

Send name, mailing address and dues to:

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

## MEMBERSHIP

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP.....	\$10.00
FAMILY.....	15.00
JUNIOR, (under 17).....	5.00
SENIOR.....	5.00
BUSINESS.....	25.00
SUPPORTING.....	25.00
SUSTAINING.....	50.00
LIFE.....	100.00

## OFFICERS

### SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY OFFICERS

President.....	William G. Copren
Vice President.....	Rita Bradley
Secretary.....	Kathleen Sprowl
Treasurer.....	Frances Brett
Corresponding Secretary & Membership Chairman.....	Lou Cooper





### KENTUCKY MINE MUSEUM NEWS

Nearly 5,000 people visited the museum and park during the summer season with almost half going on tours of the stamp mill. With such warm fall weather the museum will continue to be open weekends through October and then close until Memorial Day 1988.

Staff this year consisted of Karen Donaldson as Museum Curator and Tour Guide, with Alan Kott and Jason Lewis as Tour Guides and Museum Assistants. Both Alan and Jason were hired through Golden Sierra Job Training Agency in Nevada City. They both received many compliments from visitors. Their conscientious help and enthusiasm contributed greatly to this season's success. With Alan and Jason on staff, the museum was open seven days a week for most of July and August, and we are hoping to continue this in the years to come.

As usual, a loyal group of volunteers from all over the County helped keep things running smoothly and their support is most appreciated. Thank you all!

The museum received some valuable donations which have enhanced the displays. Among the new additions are two items donated by Mr. Ray Terrell in memory of Irma Blatchley Hope Terrell. The first is a small oak rocking chair dating to 1850 which is in excellent condition. The second is a Victor Talking Machine, a table model in working order, circa 1904.

Mr. Ray Smith of Downieville has donated some miner's picks and a mercury flask transported by mule to a mine near there. Also a wooden school desk once used at the Downieville High School and a treadle sewing machine in an oak cabinet. These are donated in memory of Connie Smith.

R. Bradner Mead has kindly donated an electric adding machine to help with the office work. Mr. Mead also arranged for the donation of a dutchman found near Bassett's Station and used in a mining operation to move heavy objects from one side of a ravine to the other.

Lillian Issel of San Francisco has donated an electric typewriter which will further update the office equipment.

Tom's Chainsaw of Sierra City has donated an electric weed trimmer. This will help to reduce fire danger along pathways.

Elva Eggars and Corine Zaro have donated a number of unique items from their family who once lived in Sierra City, including many photos and a great deal of information. Among these are a parasol brought from Italy in 1870 and the family food chopper used in making many ravioli. This collection will be used to create a display of their early family life in the area.

Several work parties were formed this summer to resurface the trestle. This work is nearing completion. Thanks to all who turned out, we will be able to use the trestle again in 1988.

The second Annual Summer Concert Series held at the Kentucky Mine Amphitheatre received enthusiastic response with capacity crowds. Several performances were given to overflow audiences. Many people came early and enjoyed a picnic at the tables under the trees. We are hoping this will be an annual event. If financial support continues, we will be able to benefit from the cultural enrichment presented in our scenic amphitheatre at the Kentucky Mine.

Until next time----have a great winter!



## SIDNEY STRAND

Sidney was the first female to graduate from Humboldt State College (at that time an all-male college). The reason she was accepted was for her high grades--and they thought she was a boy. (How many girls do you know named Sidney?)

Her first teaching assignment was in Katalia, Alaska. While there she met and married Otto Strand.

They moved to Goodyear's Bar where Sidney taught their three children at home for two years. When it came time for the two oldest to enter school and she learned that the only available transportation to and from Downieville School was in an automobile driven by a twelve year old girl, Sidney who was then a member of the School Board, went before the Supervisors and the County Superintendent of Schools to ask them to consider re-opening the Goodyear's Bar School.

After long consideration, Mrs. Strand was told that since she was a qualified teacher, they would consider re-opening the school if she could recruit a minimum of twelve students, (her daughter Auralee, age 5, was counted to make enough the first year). They ended up offering her the job which she did for twelve years.

During World War II, the Strands moved to Alameda. Sidney continued teaching there for the next nine years but they eventually returned to Goodyear's Bar. Sidney picked up where she left off by teaching three years in Downieville, four years in Sierra City and one year in North San Juan.

Her daughter, Auralee Smith, says, "She was also the moving force behind establishing library services through Plumas County Library in Quincy. Furthermore, she carried her love affair with children beyond the school room by leading youth groups, principally Scouts, Sunday School, and when we were about to embark on teenagerhood, she organized and supervised 'practice dances,' helping us all to learn to dance and how to behave at dances."

She finally taught high school when she was 70. In all, Mrs. Strand taught for forty-four years, longer than anyone else in the Nevada County Teacher's Association.

Sidney proudly says, "I love to teach and always thought it was a miracle to be paid to do what I like to do."

## SCHOOL TEACHING MEMORIES

BY BARBARA DAVEY

I taught in the Alleghany School from 1940 to 1943. I had 25 pupils in the first four grades and 25 pupils in the high school band.

The school was only two years old, and had an automatic electric heating system, which was quite a contrast to the school in Forest, which still had a pot-bellied stove. We had a janitor, while the Forest teacher was paid \$5 a month to be her own janitor. She paid a little boy 25 cents a week to build a fire in the stove every morning before school.

Mr. Sinnott was the Superintendent of Schools and taught high school in the same building. He offered me the services of his shop class and made painting easels and a very nice puppet theatre for me.

The band had very pretty blue wool capes with gold satin linings. When we practiced marching down the street, we could only have three students in a row--two marching in the ruts and one marching up the middle.

I taught band every day after school. Then every Tuesday night I taught the woodwind section separately and every Thursday night the brass section. In the summer I taught band every Wednesday night, had individual lessons before school, at lunchtime and all day Saturday. I was paid \$400 a year for this. My annual salary was \$1,320 for my grammar school job.

It was a lot of fun and I enjoyed every minute of it.

## MARGARET BURRELLE - SIERRAVILLE

I entered the Calpine School in the fall of 1937 to teach the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades with an enrollment of 46 students. Mr. McDonald had 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grades with about the same number of students. I was certainly a green teacher, shaking in my boots. I soon learned all my college years of collecting for these coming years was no good, so I threw it all out the window, rolled up my sleeves, and went to work.

While I taught in Calpine, I spent most of the year with my very close friend, Margaret Pearce Banks. We had many a laugh looking out the window at Mr. Milsap going home. He would come down the walk weaving right and left and not a soul in sight (he was the principal).



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

WILLIAM G. COPREN

I had many superior students during this time who went on to successful professions. Most of my pupils went on to trade schools or colleges. One boy had an I.Q. of 160. I thought he would be one of our future famous scientists, but he went one semester, and is now happily logging and working for CalTrans.

Four years later Calpine closed its doors. I applied and got the school in Forest where I taught all grades except 7th--a new experience. I taught one year here and then married in 1941. This year was a very happy one, and I had a wonderful time: potlucks and supper dances, with Forest and Alleghany participating; ski trips to Bald Mountain; the weekly show; a fashion show; and a three act play. We all walked the trail between the two towns. One mile up and one mile down--regular mountain goats.

When I worked in Forest, we were snowed in from Christmas until Easter. I came out for Easter on a stage to Nevada City, caught a bus to Colfax, then took a train to Truckee, where my parents met me with a car.

When World War II happened, we had to move from Forest. Jerry, my husband, went into the service and I went to Sierraville. That fall I went to work in the 3rd and 4th grades in Loyalton under Edna Gottardi. This, too, was a pleasant year except that Mr. Allen turned the heat off at 11:00 a.m. and we froze until 2:00 p.m. when the heater came on with a vengeance and we removed all sweaters, coats, etc. I had a cold all year.

The following two years I taught in Sierraville. I then quit teaching to have my second son, Robert, who is now a 1st grade teacher in Alturas. I went back to teaching in Sierraville School when Bob was in the 3rd grade. I remained there until my retirement in 1974.

After I retired, I returned to teach the 7th and 8th grades in the Loyalton School for a semester as a favor to Mrs. Gottardi as one of her teachers had to resign. My years in the classroom were 28.

In the last issue of the Sierra County Historical Society's publication I spoke about the concern historians must show when extremists attack the institutions of a representative democracy. Regardless of where extremism occurs, it has no place in the system. Western civilization has chosen to maintain its social and economic institutions.

This is a publication of local history, and it is imperative that we address the local story. The attack on local institutions continues in Sierra County. Front organizations are established to hide their actions. If one testifies, as I have, concerning historical issues before the Planning Commission, one is personally attacked. Disinformation is spread by unsleeping fanatics. Personal vendettas are raised to the point of policy issues. Attacks on the Historical Society's management of the Kentucky Mine Museum have switched from the tactic of direct confrontation concerning state grants and constant safety inspections to indirect financial issues. The Supervisors now want the Historical Society to cover costs that were not previously part of the agreement. When the frontal assaults were not successful, the terrorists reverted to the tactics of guerrilla warfare.

The agenda is broad; the goal is narrow. The intent amounts to nothing but destruction of local cultural and governmental institutions--anarchy. The time has come for the uninvolved but massive majority in Sierra County to stand up and be counted. The alternative is government by a fanatical and very small minority.

In no case where extremists have gained control have the uncompromising fanatics been in the majority. In every case, the majority stood on the sidelines or were intimidated into silence. Persons involved in the cultural institutions such as the Historical Society should remember the following indictment against those who allowed the Nazi Brown Shirts to overwhelm the uninvolved German nation.

"When they came for the Jews, I was not a Jew so I said nothing. When they came for the trade unionists, I was not a trade unionist so I said nothing. When they came for the Communists, I was not a Communist so I said nothing. When they came for the Catholics, I was not a Catholic so I said nothing. When they came for me, there was no one left to say anything."

JOIN THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY! SEND \$10. ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES TO P.O. BOX 260, SIERRA CITY, CA 96125.



## TEACHING IN DOWNIEVILLE AND SIERRAVILLE

## GEORGENE COPREN

When I received my teaching credential from U.C. Berkeley in 1929, no one was hiring teachers. I took a job in San Francisco with an insurance company for the munificent amount of \$60 a month. However, lunch was 20 cents--10 cents for a sandwich and 10 cents for a cup of coffee, so it sufficed.

No one was actually jumping out of windows on Montgomery Street where I worked as the economy got worse and worse, but it was a pretty glum bunch of people who walked along that street.

In January of 1930, I received a call for a long term substitute job in Downieville for the grand salary of \$180 a month. That was riches in those days.

My young brother had just been graduated from high school, so my mother told him to go up with me for a week or two, ostensibly as a graduation present, but, I am sure, it was because she was worried about her only daughter leaving the city for the first time. On the way up in the old bus everyone kept asking, "When is it going to snow?" My brother and I, never having seen snow, were anxious for it to start! Just before we reached Downieville, it started to snow, and it snowed and snowed and snowed!--one of the worst storms Downieville had ever seen.

While I was busy with my teaching job, there was nothing for my brother to do. At that time skiing wasn't the big thing it is today. He asked someone what was interesting to do in Downieville and was answered, "Today is the supervisors' meeting day. That's always exciting." Things haven't changed much.

There was one other teacher and me who taught all four years of high school. One of my students couldn't learn Spanish and he had to have a second language in order to graduate. It was decided that I should teach him Latin. Why Latin would be easier to learn than Spanish, I never did figure out. And I had never studied Latin! Anyway, I learned a lesson each night and taught it to him the next day. He graduated!

I enjoyed my few months in Downieville. The only thing wrong, as I thought of it later, was that the chemistry lab was in the basement, with only a little winding stairway up. If anything had ever happened down there, neither I nor my students would have been able to get out. Fortunately that old building has been replaced.

In September I received a contract to teach in the high school in Sierraville. When we got to Sierraville, there was no school of any kind. The former school had burned and the new one wouldn't be completed for another six months. Mr. Jim Sinnott and I taught in the parsonage the first semester. The building was pretty ramshackled--you could see daylight through many cracks. Our drinking water came from a well in the yard and we trudged out to a two-holer when nature called. One week we had to shut the school down because the trustees decided we needed separate latrines for girls and boys.

Jim and I taught all four grades to 16 students. On the whole they were pretty good kids. Of course, on Halloween they put a wheelbarrow full of rocks on the teacher's desk and knocked over the latrines. They did it the day before and the day after, too, to be sure we noticed.

We had one boy who was pretty obstreperous. One day he dared Jim to fight him. Paul was pretty strong and husky. He thought he could easily beat Jim, but he didn't. He was a rather chastened student for a while after that. Of course, now Jim would never have dared fight a student, but it worked then. And Paul had to pay for his sins--he married a school teacher and became one himself.

When we returned to school after Christmas, there was a beautiful new school. I had a lovely chemistry lab with all the necessities. I also taught English, Spanish and Algebra. Jim taught History, Science and P.E., and coached the boys in basketball.

The high school was in Sierraville until 1948 when they started busing the students to a larger school in Loyalton.





Downieville High — 1930

the town was booming. Jean lived at the boarding house along with Francea Antone Johnson and Dr. Padgett. She remembers the great supper dances that were held and what fun they were for all.

In August of '36 she moved to Sattley to teach all eight grades. The schoolhouse was the present home of the Ed Turner's. The first winter the snow was so bad Elmer Marti-netti was her only student. Finally after trying to walk, use snowshoes, ride horseback and ride on a tractor, the school was closed for two weeks. She had to make up the lost time at the end of the semester.

In the winter of '36 Jean left for Christmas vacation and when she came back to Sierra Valley she had to ride the snowplow to Sattley. This was an all night ride and everyone was snowbound until March. Jean boarded with Irma Miller and they ran out of bread, airplane gas (which was used for lights) and other things.

Mrs. Margaret Elaine Lambert was County Treasurer at that time. When Jean received the warrant for her salary of \$110 a month, she asked if she could have her pay in cash since she had no bank account. Mrs. Lambert agreed on the condition that Jean open a bank account.

Jean was the last teacher in Sattley after which they started busing the children to Sierraville. She enjoyed her teaching experience in Sierra County and went on to teach in various schools around the State.



Sierraville Students — 1930

### JEAN HERRINGTON'S SCHOOL TEACHING MEMORIES

Jean Herrington, nee Innis, is a member of the pioneer Busch family. As a young child she lived with her grandmother and attended first grade in the school across the street which is now the Buttes View Supply.

After receiving her BA degree in education from San Francisco State in 1933, her first school was in Alleghany substituting for Doris Baker who was married before the end of the term. (Women teachers then were not supposed to be married.) Mary Shepard Clemo and Judge Hardy's son attended the school at that time. Since the 16 to 1 Mine was operating,



Jean Herrington in Sierra Valley