

# Sierra County Historical Society

*Member of California Conference of Historical Societies*

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Vol. XVIII, No. 1

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Spring 1990

## FAMILIES OF GOLD IN SIERRA COUNTY

In personal letters, many things can be expressed. The letter can be a recording of life's events, both important matters and descriptions of everyday life, details about the health of the writer and expressions of his or her feelings and thoughts. When letters are saved over a long period of time, the collection can become a valuable record of a family's life and a window into the past.

Just such a collection of letters has remained with the descendants of David and Helena Van Clief Cowden, once residents of Downieville.

The letters were saved by Helena Cowden throughout her life. They document the family's life, as well as provide a unique record of events in the Sierra County area in the 1860's and 70's.

David Hunter Cowden was born in 1839 in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania. He was the son of Rhoda Galloway Cowden and Dr. Joseph Cowden. David came to California in 1863, at the age of 24, and became the first teacher and principal of the first public school in Downieville. (The school was located on Pearl Street on Jersey Flat, across from the present Tabor home.) He studied law, and in 1862, was admitted to practice. He held the office of undersheriff for several years.

In 1865, he met and married Helena Van Clief, daughter of a prominent Downieville attorney, Judge Peter Van Clief. Helena was born in about 1847 in Ohio, before the family settled in California. Her mother died in 1856, her father remarried in 1858.

Peter Van Clief and his son-in-law, David H. Cowden, practiced law together, having an office in Downieville and, later, after 1870, in Marysville. Before moving to Marysville, David was County District Attorney for two years, 1868 and 1869, and later served as County Probate Judge.

David and Helena Cowden were the parents of six children, two sons who died soon after birth, and four other children — Cornelia "Nina," born in 1869; Edith, born in 1872; Bessie, born in about 1876, and David Van Clief Cowden, born in 1880. All the children were born in Downieville.

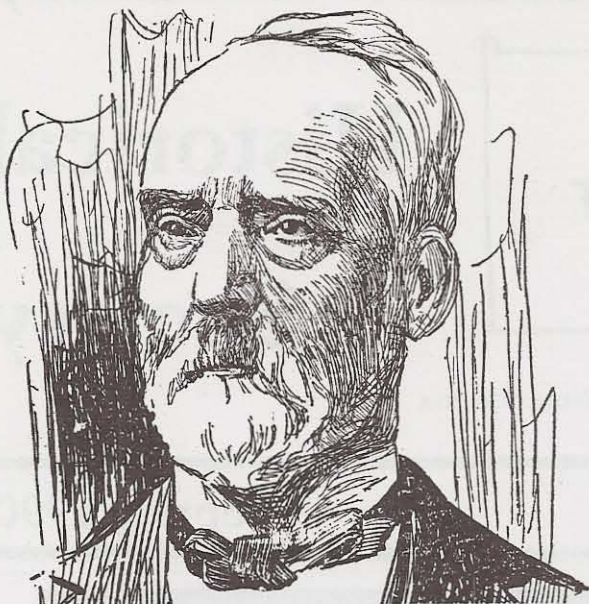


David Van Clief Cowden, born in the home of Dr. Aikins in Downieville in 1880, was the grandson of Peter Van Clief. A graduate of Stanford University, he followed the legal profession and became a land attorney for the Southern Pacific Railroad.

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The letters in this collection span the years from 1863 to 1896. They are addressed to either Helena Van Clief Cowden or Nina Cowden. There are letters from both Peter Van Clief to his daughter and granddaughter and from David Cowden to his wife and daughters. The letters record happenings from the time Helena was in school in Marysville (before her marriage to David), through the years of her marriage and the birth of her children. They are also sent by her father to Helena in San Jose where she resided after her husband's death. The letters to Nina date from the time when she was a very young girl through young adulthood.





Judge Peter Van Clief, pioneer, miner, attorney and eminent jurist of California.

OFFICE OF VANCLIEF & COWDEN,  
ATTORNEYS AT LAW.

Downieville, June 21<sup>st</sup> 1867

Dear Helena,

I am only going to write you a line. My object is to send you a note to let your father just think of it. He will write 184 lbs a nice little amount and she. I feel very much better indeed. I gained four lbs while below. I found our Father well he talks of taking a ride over to Quincy soon. Give my love to all inquiring friends.

The remainder of the Cowden collection contains letters written after David Cowden's death in 1881. Peter Van Clief continued writing to his daughter Helena, sending money to help support the family and provide partially for the children's education. He corresponded with his granddaughter, Nina, while she was in school in San Diego. Nina later returned to Downieville and became a schoolteacher there.

Peter Van Clief tells in many of the letters about his involvement with many different mining operations in Sierra County. As far as the letters tell, these were never very prosperous, however Van Clief generously kept sending money to his daughter and grandchildren, even in those years when mining was poor and his law practice was not as busy as he would have liked.

The Cowden collection ends with several letters that document the death of Peter Van Clief in 1896 in San Francisco.

## 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, 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 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!

### OFFICERS and STAFF

President .....	Lincoln Madsen
Vice President .....	Rita Bradley
Recording Secretary .....	Georgene Copren
Treasurer and Membership Chairman .....	Maren Scholberg
Editors .....	Leonard Berardi and Karen Donaldson

### MEETING NOTICE:

The Sierra County Historical Society will meet on April 22, 1990 at the home of Mrs. Amy Bowman. This business meeting is scheduled for 2:00 p.m. and will not include a potluck luncheon. Loganville is located four miles west of Sierra City on Highway 49. Telephone 862-1248 for more information if necessary.

### MEMBERSHIP:

Due to rising costs of publication and postage the Historical Society will no longer be able to send bulletins to members not current with their dues. Please be reminded that membership dues are due and payable in January for each upcoming calendar year. Those members who may have allowed their dues to lapse may feel free and are encouraged to send their payment even now!

Categories are as follows:

SENIOR .....	\$ 5.00
INDIVIDUAL .....	10.00
FAMILY & INSTITUTION .....	15.00
BUSINESS & SUPPORTING .....	25.00
SUSTAINING .....	50.00
LIFE (per individual) .....	100.00

Please send dues to the Treasurer and Membership Chairman:

Mrs. Maren Scholberg  
P.O. Box 141  
Sierraville CA 96126





## KENTUCKY MINE MUSEUM NEWS

After another seemingly endless winter, Spring has arrived and with it increased activity and plans for the upcoming 1990 summer season. Even when not officially open there is much behind the scenes activity here. This past fall the Sierra County Public Works Director Tim Beals administered a State grant that finally allowed some long held dreams to be realized. The stamp mill now has windows! They are wood frame 6 over panel double hung windows and most closely resemble the original ones. Besides providing much needed weather protection, they look great. Some additional paving was done at the amphitheatre and the steps were completed allowing for increased safety and smoothing out traffic flow problems. Hand rails were added for safety as well. A continuous handrail now exists from the bottom door of the mill building to the top of the path by the museum. We would still like to timber the mine portal area and open up the front portion to enhance the tours. Several people have expressed an interest in helping with the project and hopefully we can begin this year.

Dave Yost of Sacramento has donated new interpretive signs for the outdoor artifacts. They are a great improvement.

Steve Harte donated some conveyor belt lacing so we can repair the broken belt in the mill.

Charles K. Smith has been very active in helping get our new Kentucky Mine Memorial established. Among other things, he has provided beautiful oak boards which will be mounted inside the entrance to the museum. Bronze plaques will be affixed to commemorate families and persons involved in the History of Sierra City and Sierra County. A separate book will contain additional information contributed by the families wishing to be remembered. We are in the process of designating categories of donation. Inquiries are welcome from anyone desiring to permanently honor their family and its role in local history.

The Kentucky Mine will be featured in an upcoming issue of *Sunset Magazine*. A writer and photographer from the magazine spent the greater part of a day with the curator touring the museum and mill. This will be included in an article on Sierra City in general. Coming soon! We were last mentioned in that publication in 1984 and as a result saw an increase in visitors.

The Kentucky Mine Summer Concert Series was a tremendous success last year and we are pleased to be continuing it again in 1990. A list of the performances will be printed separately. It added some needed revenue to the museum as well as culturally enriching our lives here.

At least 4,135 people visited the museum and took the tour last year.

A work party date to help spruce up the grounds will be determined at the meeting on April 22. Anyone is welcome to help, of course, and may call the museum if you'd like to volunteer.

The traditional opening is Memorial Day weekend which this year will be Saturday, May 26. Here's to another busy season!

## Long Overdue Thanks

Editor:

This is long overdue, but I want to thank Sierra County and the CETA program for the experience I received as the first curator of the Sierra County Historical Park and Museum at the Kentucky Mine. The skills and experience I received through this program and employment have helped me greatly during the past 10 years in my position as a Historical Guide at the Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument, popularly known as Hearst Castle.

I would like to support anyone who is considering working at the Kentucky Mine Museum with the idea of getting experience for the future. You will learn how to work with the public, caring for irreplaceable historical objects and respect for history. A very important benefit from the study of history is that you will get a better understanding of why the world is as it is today.

Again thank you Sierra County and CETA for helping me at a time I needed it.

*Mountain Messenger, April 5, 1990*

James Fajardo  
Cambria, Calif.

*The museum is now accepting applications for Tour Guide/Assistant Curator for the summer 1990 session. If interested contact Karen Donaldson, Curator at 862-1310.*

**DOWNIEVILLE** – The Sierra County Board of Supervisors met in regular session in Downieville on April 3. In attendance were Chairman Jerry McCaffrey and Supervisors Don McIntosh, Don Bowling, Babe Lewis and Criag McHenry.

**PLANNING** – Director of Planning Tim Beals requested direction on a proposal to consider the Kentucky Mine Historical Park Museum as a State owned/operated facility. According to Beals a meeting has been set May 18 to meet with State representatives at the Park to discuss the possibilities of State ownership. The Board decided to direct the Parks and Recreation Committee to invite representatives from the Sierra County Historical Society and the Kentucky Mine Concert Series to attend the meeting.



## MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER'S JOURNAL

James H. Galloway  
1853-1883

"This is Sunday. One week ago James, Wash, Kenneth A. and I went up to Keisters. We talked about Kenneth starting to California. Little did James and Wash think then that they would be out on the road now. Kenneth and Wash started Wednesday with Purcell. James started Thursday with John S. Dooley. The night before he started Father was over at John S. Dooley's. Says Dooley to him, 'I want another hand, and tell Jim to bring over fifty dollars and go with me.' So he and Father talked with James about it and he concluded that if he could go reasonable he would go. So in the morning Father went over to Dooley's and made the bargain for James to go for his work. We gave him 42 pounds of bacon and 25 dollars. They are all on their winding way."

This note was originally written on the page of an arithmetic notebook by sixteen year old John Galloway, a younger brother of James Galloway. It is the only record of how James Galloway, my great-grandfather, happened to come to California at the age of 18 from Bellevue, Jackson County, Iowa. However, it is only the beginning of a well-documented record. James had only one day to get ready for the trip west that would take him from his family; evidently he took some notebooks in which he kept a record of his travels. These he later transferred to a journal which he kept until his untimely death 30 years later. Most of the first 20 years were spent in Sierra County. They tell of some incidents in the life of a typical miner.

So, overnight, it was decided that James would be "another hand" in the overland party of John S. Dooley. My great-grandfather's journal begins on Thursday, March 31, 1853. It was entitled "Journal From Home to Salt Lake."

"I left home at noon. Went to Mr. John S. Dooley's. We started from there at 2 o'clock. Stopped at John Bredens three miles south of Andrew. Distance traveled today - six miles."

The Journal is a day by day record of the trip from Iowa. The names of some of the people in the Dooley-Purcell party were mentioned. It is unfortunate that he couldn't write more fully of his experiences, but paper was a precious commodity.

On August 16 is an entry: "Came to the Humboldt at the 75 mile crossing. 17th. Lay by. My reason for not keeping this journal the entire rout (sic) was that I could not get paper to write on."

"I arrived at Bear Valley on the 17th of September 1853. Here I left those with whom I had crossed the Plains. Here I considered that my journey ended, for I was now in California. On the 18th I went to Little York, on the 19th to Nevada (City), 20th and 21st went to Forest City. Worked around there part of the time until the 24th of October when I hired to Winters and Hepperley for \$50.00 per month. December 6th went to Minnesota, bought into a claim which I worked until the 13th of April following. In the meantime I began a journal. (This last entry was added to the Journal in 1860.)

### LIFE IN CALIFORNIA

"Diary Commencing March 1st, 1854

Wednesday, March 1st, 1854. I am living in a log cabin on the South end of Minnesota Flat with Hiram Arches, Patrick



James H. Galloway and Emily Hoover Galloway.  
Taken at Howland Flat, June 18, 1865.

Hays and Thomas Bull. I worked in the Jackson Tunnel today and half of last night. It had snowed some today. The following entries were written a line per day. They indicated he worked in the tunnel and the weather outside generally miserable. He occasionally went to Forest City. On April 1st he finally mentioned his cousin, James Galloway, who came from Forest City. This was his first cousin, more commonly known in Sierra County as Judge James Galloway. He came to Sierra County with Major Downie in 1850 and married in that year. (James H. Galloway, to distinguish himself from his cousin, added the middle initial H. to his name after he came to Sierra County.)

"April 25th. Galloway and I split 150 boards this afternoon."

"Wednesday 26th. Went with Galloway and Reed to lookout a rout (sic.) for a waggon road in to town."

"Thursday 27th. Worked on the road part of the day." (This would be known as Galloway Road.)

"Friday 28th. Getty and I cut sleepers for Galloway's house. Cut out a road to haul them."

"Sunday 30th. Snowed and rained. Went with Dic Cowden to drive his pigs off the hill"

This is the first mention of his cousins Cowden, who preceded him to Sierra County. Dr. Joseph Cowden was active in Forest City in 1854, married there in 1857 and was a Fourth Corporal in the Forest Rifles in 1859. He died in Downieville in 1865.

"Monday, June 26, 1854. Jos. Cowden & I selected a place to build a cabin. Tuesday, 27th. Cut logs with Jo for a cabin. Wednesday, 28th. Cut logs and leveled a place for a cabin. Thursday 29th. Dic Cowden hauled our logs. Friday 30th. Jo



& I worked until evening at the cabin. Saturday July 1st. At Forest City. I was sick at Galloway's. June 16th. Went up above the Galloway Ranch where they were putting up snow. Monday 27th. Packed down a load of snow on a mule." Then he went back to work in the Enterprise Tunnel, Forest City.

James stayed at his cousin Dick Cowden's Ranch, off and on. "September 13th. James Cowden & I cut logs for a cabin at Forest City. Thursday, 14th. Hauled the logs for a cabin. Friday, 15th. Began to raise the cabin. Saturday 16th. Finished the cabin. Went with Jas. C. to hunt a shingle tree. Sunday 17th. Went with Galloway on mules to gather plums; found plenty."

He spent the next week working on the cabin with James and on Sunday went to church at night.

Jim Cowden was one of the founders of the Bald Mountain Mine and one of their relatives, Judge Peter Van Clief, continued to work it until 1887.

"Sunday, October 1st, 1854. James, Joseph & Dickson Cowden and myself moved into our cabin. Moved down to the lower cabin."

By November he was getting restless. He went to Washington twice, once getting a pair of pants. On the 29th he went to Nevada City, a distance of 16 miles, and back to Forest City the next day. Christmas was also a little different in those days.

"Sunday, the 24th. Washed some dirt today." And on the 25th, "Christmas. Rained. Tuesday, 26th. Done nothing."

In January he purchased an accordion for \$13.00.

To my knowledge, James did not see any of the members of the wagon train he came with to California, however, he mentioned seeing Wash James in October of 1854. He was about two years older than James Galloway and had lived near the Galloway family in Bellvue, Iowa.

James H. Galloway was to remain in Sierra County mining in various locations for eight long years. Typical entries showed that he "Went to Nevada City." "Bought in on a claim." "Building a log cabin." "Worked in tunnel." "Washed dirt." "Sold my interest." "Prospected." "Hired two Chinamen." "Have \$120 for two weeks' work." "Attended sluice, 29 ounces today." "Had a dispute with a Dutchman about our line."

James sent money home when he could, mentioning it in the next letter to see if it had been received. His diversions from work were simple: He "visited with Galloways in Downieville." "Went to church tonight." "Baked pies this afternoon." "Wrote a letter to father."

## RETURN TO IOWA

By 1861 James had saved enough gold to return to Iowa as a successful young man of 26 Years. This time he left San Francisco on a steamer, daily recording the distance traveled. He crossed the Isthmus, and on to New York. He soon bought a horse and Carriage and drove to Iowa. At a party the night after he arrived home, he met Emily (Emma) Hoover, and in less than two months they were married.

## MARRIED LIFE IN CALIFORNIA

Soon after their marriage, Emma and James H. Galloway headed for California via New York and the Isthmus.

For the next fourteen years the couple lived in California, first in the mining country of northern Sierra County. Weather was frequently mentioned in the daily account.

Emma's first two children were born in March with snow many feet deep outside the little home. In 1868 the family of four made a return trip to see relatives in Iowa. On their return, they settled briefly in San Jose, where James tried his hand at farming. While there, the third child, my grandfather John Debo Galloway, was born. But James kept thinking he could do better at mining, and they returned to Sierra County.

After a short stay with no good luck at mining, he next tried owning and operating a store in Oakland. He was familiar with that area, frequently visiting an aunt and uncle there, but he learned the hard way that folks don't always pay their debts to store-owners. So, once again the family moved, this time to Napa Valley, where they had a little house on the property of friends from Sierra County days. Again James tried farming, with no more success than previously. In July of 1874 he records a visit to San Francisco where he occasionally speculated in stocks. Discovery of rich ore bodies in Virginia City brought the entry, "Getting ready to go to Virginia City" in 1875.

Again the mining life had its ups and downs, heat in the mines bringing about illness due to temperature changes, occasional injuries and then, in just two years, the death of his dear wife. The older son remained with his father, the daughter was already in a boarding school in Reno, and "Johnny-Bo," too lively to be welcomed into the household of his aunt in Sacramento, was sent on to the Napa home of the Klams, where he spent the next 5½ years. When 14, John returned to Virginia City and his father. The reunion was cut short by a mining accident, and the three children were orphaned.

Thus ended the life of a high type of miner whose painstaking diary gives us a glimpse of daily life 100 years ago. Although his hopes of wealth and affluence never materialized, he left a heritage of hard work and devotion to family. His son, John-Bo, used the \$1,000.00 he received from his father's life insurance policy to pay for his education.

I am indeed proud of my great-grandfather, James H. Galloway.

Margaret Wiltshire

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

The Sierra County Historical Society thanks Mrs. Margaret Wiltshire for her generosity in sharing the historical material and photographs contained in this issue. If any other Historical Society member has material suitable for publication, please write to: Sierra County Historical Society, P.O. Box 260, Sierra City, CA 96125 or call Karen at (916) 862-1310.



## MINUTES OF THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The October 8, 1989 meeting of the Sierra County Historical Society was held in the recreation room of the Loyaltan Museum with President Linc Madsen presiding. Fifteen members were present. The treasurer reported that the Museum has a balance of \$3,154.15; the Society has a balance of \$1,338.80. The Concert Series committee made a total payment of \$900.00 to the Museum savings account, to be held in reserve to begin next year's summer programs.

It was announced that the paving project for the handicapped access to the Museum is in progress. The windows in the mill, siding and preservative and hand rail outside the mill will all be finished. The oar car in the mine had to be removed but another car is to be donated. Fire extinguishers have been installed in the mill and museum buildings.

The president appointed Bill Copren to head a museum control committee consisting of both museum curators and the president of the Historical Society. This committee is to have control of all artifacts in both museums, requiring their approval for the removal of artifacts from any facility.

A proposal was brought up by Bill Copren who stated the County might be interested in turning the Kentucky Mine over to the State for operation. President Madsen expressed adamant opposition to the idea and it was generally agreed by the membership present that the Historical Society would not be in support of the proposal.

The next meeting will be April 22nd at 2 p.m. Amy Bowman graciously volunteered the use of her home in Loganville for the meeting.

Georgene Copren, Secretary

### Editor's Note:

President Linc Madsen has been away for the winter and unavailable to comment in the President's Message column. This issue was discussed at the last meeting of the Historical Society (see minutes). Supervisor Lewis personally contacted the State representative in this matter and set the date for the meeting on May 18 at the Kentucky Mine and as such, it would appear that she is responsible for initiating this proposal. There are currently at least three board members, including Supervisor Lewis, who are in favor of this proposal. Seven members of the Historical Society were present at the April 3 meeting and Bill Copren publicly stated his concern that action was being attempted without any contact with the Historical Society. A county representative will be present at the April 22 meeting and it is therefore urgent that all interested persons attend.

## GENEALOGY SEMINAR

The Sierra County Historical Society will be hosting a Genealogy Seminar conducted by Ronald A. Bremer of Salt Lake City, Utah. It will be held at the Sierra City Community hall and will be free of charge. The date has been tentatively set for Tuesday, August 28, 1990 at 7:00 p.m. It will last approximately two hours.

Mr. Bremer is a former Research Specialist for the Family History Library in Salt Lake City and author of "The Compendium of Historical Sources" and "The World's Funniest Epitaphs." He is listed in "Who's Who in the West" and a contributor to numerous genealogical magazines. As the date approaches please feel free to contact Karen Donaldson at (916) 862-1310 for more information.

## A Series of Summer Concerts AT THE Kentucky Mine Amphitheatre

1 Mile North of Sierra City on Highway 49

- July 6 At last, the long awaited return of SUKAY with their dynamic combination of new and traditional music from the Andes.
- July 13 Theatre aficionados will delight in the return of the RENO LITTLE THEATRE and their eight member cast's interpretation of the farcial comedy, Run for Your Wife.
- July 20 HAWKS AND EAGLES present their own special blend of traditional cowboy songs, wild gypsy dance tunes, internationally influenced folk music, as well as boisterous humor and storytelling.
- July 27 An evening of music and song entitled "From the Met to Broadway" as presented by LAWRENCE VENZA, MARCIA COPE-HART, and CHARLES WORTH.
- August 3 A perennial foothill favorite - BACKWOODS JAZZ - promises to provide us with an evening of acoustic upbeat jazz, tempered by their own unique "backwoods" style.
- August 10 Vaudeville comes to Sierra City with an outrageously hilarious performance by the EDLOS.
- August 17 A delightful evening of music and verse starting with a performance of Celtic harp music performed by KIM ROBERTSON. From traditional Irish jigs and airs, timeless folk melodies from around the world, to her own original compositions - a performance not to be missed. McAVOY LANE then brings us his interpretation of the life of a genuine Sierra Nevada folk hero, Mark Twain.
- August 24 The classical tradition continues at the Kentucky Mine Amphitheatre with a performance by the TWIN CITIES CHAMBER PLAYERS. Highlighted will be a selection from the Brandenburg Concertos, as well as original compositions by William J. Sydeman.
- August 31 SWING FEVER will close out the season for us with a rousing program of "swing" music. This five piece band promises to be the "grand finale" for this years performances.

All performances begin at 8:00 p.m.

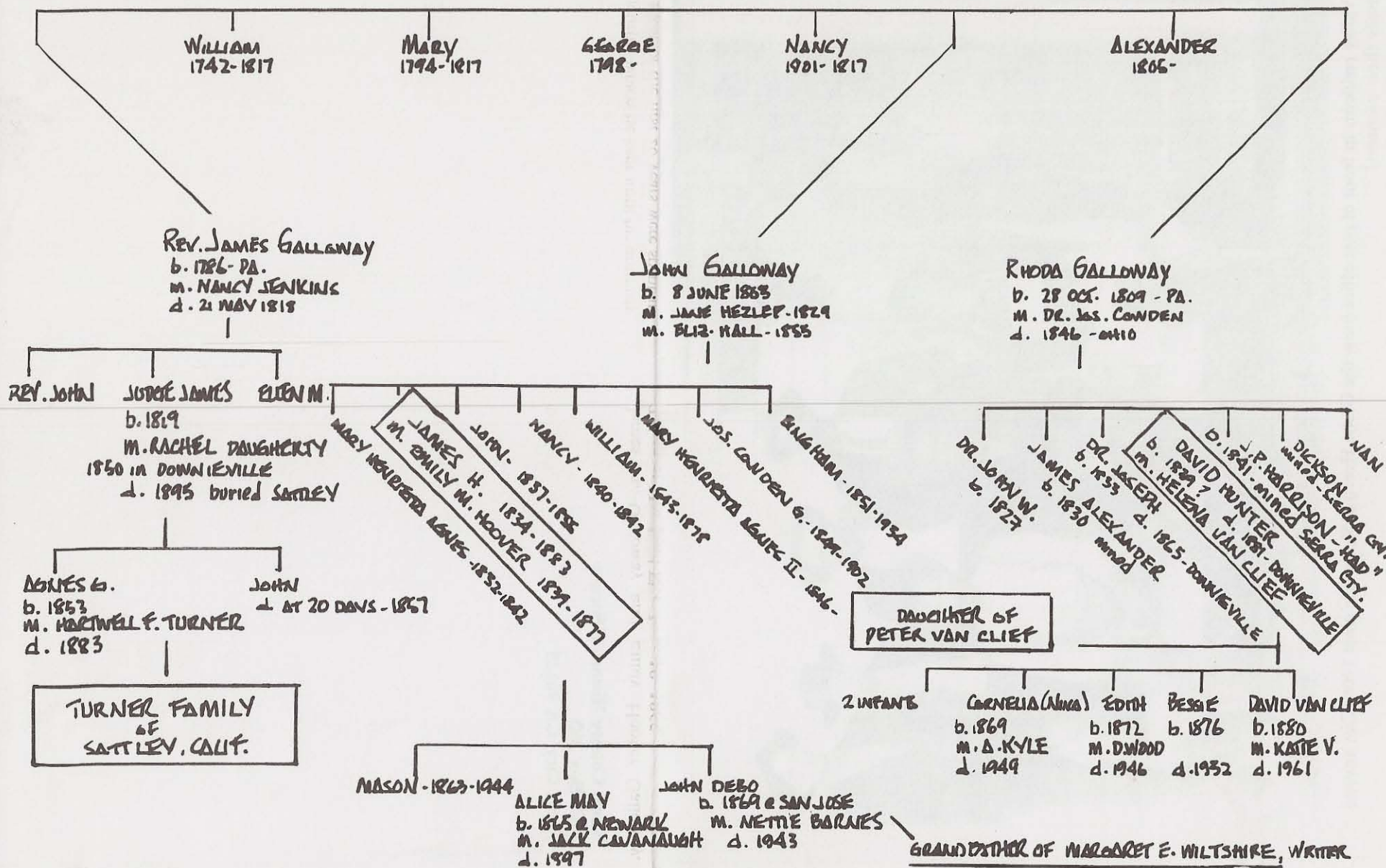
Complimentary reserved seating to 7:45 p.m.

Popcorn and softdrinks available.



## EARLY SIERRA COUNTY FAMILIES ~ THE GALLOWAYS, COWDENS, VAN CLIEFS, &amp; TURNERS

JOHN GALLOWAY  
1759-1819  
M. NANCY HUNTER - 1785  
FRANKLIN COUNTY, PA.





# Sierra County Historical Society

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



Early Sierra Valley residents in front of post office (now the Globe Hotel) at Sierraville circa 1908. Can anyone help us identify these pioneers?