

Sierra County

Historical

Society

Member of California Conference of Historical Societies

Volume XIX, No. 2

Fall 1991



The heavy snows of that week had completely blocked both the highway up from Downieville and also from the east over the Yuba Pass. Other people were moved out of their homes into the Inn, Mr. Jones declared the school officially closed, and for the next two weeks the entire town enjoyed one of those rare communal times that occur so infrequently in modern society. Electricity and phones were out. People dug into their freezers and the whole town shared. My mother made endless loaves of bread in the big industrial oven at the Inn, other women came to help with the cooking, and we ate imaginative dinners by candlelight at a great long table in the hotel's dining room. Men went out in groups to shovel roofs in danger of collapsing from the enormous snow build-up, and we children had a wonderful extended Christmas vacation skiing, sledding and generally getting every ounce of fun from this unexpected adventure.

AVALANCHE!

9:10 Monday morning, January 10, 1952, Sierra City, California. I was ten years old. It was just another school day that normally would have found me at my desk, dreamily counting snowflakes through the tall paned windows of our relic of a schoolhouse. But, mercifully, I was home in bed (in our Morrison family home on Church Street) with a cold, attempting to do the same calculations through my bedroom window. But a furious white drama was going on out there. During the night, the kind of blizzard not experienced since the terrible winter of 1890 had hurled its force on our little Gold Rush town and this morning it was still raging. Sierra City, making its way through the Twentieth Century like a sleepy afterthought of its former days of glory as a bustling mining town, lies at the northern end of Highway 49 in western Sierra County. Built on an ancient glacial moraine, it nestles like a cup between fir-covered jagged ridges to the south, east, and west, and the stark vulcan mass of the Sierra Buttes on the north.

As it turned out, I was not the only student who had stayed away from school that day. The evening before, our conscientious teacher, Hugh Jones, had trudged from home to home through the blizzard, warning parents it might be dangerous to send their children to school in the morning. In the years since that morning in 1952, I have often wondered at the providence that insured all parents follow that warning, keeping twenty-three children at home and saved from certain death — because the next few minutes that morning indeed carried a deadly potential.

Cozy under my quilt, I sat propped up in bed preparing royally to take full advantage of my cold — a cup of hot tea that my mother (Mabel Cartwright) was about to bring me. Facing me and to the right of my bedroom's south window in our 1890's home, was a long gilt-framed mirror. In the mirror I saw my mother coming from the kitchen carrying a little pot of tea on a tray. She, too, could see me, and before she got to the bedroom door, she saw reflected a rather alarming sight. In those few seconds that I had watched her progress from the kitchen, I had become conscious of an ever-increasing wail and roar. The wind had begun to scream and the trees outside were whipping crazily back and forth. Before I could even think of where to run, the fury reached a climax: the roar was as though a giant shrieking freight train were thundering down off the Buttes, heading directly toward our house. As the rumble reached a crescendo outside on the street, the house jolted sickeningly. With a deafening crash, the window to my left on the street side sprayed into my bedroom in a thousand jagged pieces, and in the mirror, my mother saw a driven mass of snow pour through the broken window and swirl across my bed like a white tidal wave frothed with dark green. Stunned, I sat frozen beneath the weight of the strange moving blanket that had suddenly covered me. It was the fan edge of an avalanche that was pouring into our home and riding it was a floatsam of what it had uprooted and swept along in its fury.

When my mother rushed into the bedroom, the snow was still pouring through the window. Outside, still wailing and roaring, the massive white freight train of the avalanche churned down our street.

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
Typesetting	Howard Landers

MEETING NOTICE

The next meeting will be a potluck on October 20 at 1:00 p.m. at the Sierraville Community Hall.

Georgene Copren, Recording Secretary

MEMBERSHIP

As of September, 1991, there are 143 paid members of the Sierra County Historical Society. We thank each one for their support. The membership funds are used primarily for the publication of our semi-annual Bulletin, "The Sierran"

Under a new policy, membership due notices will be sent out in January as a reminder.

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

Dues are to be sent to the Treasurer and Membership Chairman:

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



KENTUCKY MINE MUSEUM NEWS

We are nearing the close of another season and the time seems to have flown by. A very successful work party May 18 and 19 started things off. Fifteen volunteers accomplished a great deal including some spring cleaning indoors, brushing and limbing outdoors and painting of the restrooms. Thanks everyone!

The Downieville High School graduation took place at the amphitheatre June 7 with Nine graduates and well over 200 people in attendance. The fiberglass acoustical shell, having met with natural disaster over the winter, was replaced with a more rustic backstage of mine timbers and redwood lattice constructed by Dennis Messa, Frank Carter and myself just in time for the commencement exercises. Reports over the summer have been favorable regarding style and function.

The County has promised a grant of \$20,000 to be spent at the Kentucky Mine this year with a priority to be retimbering the mine portal. At this time nothing has materialized and comments from the Department of Public Works are vague.

Nearly 4,000 visitors have been to the museum and gone on the stamp mill tour so far this year. Apparently tourism is down in the area and our numbers reflect that. The museum admission has remained at \$1.00 but the tour fee was raised to \$4.00. This has helped offset the loss of revenue and meet our operating costs.

No student help was available this year through Golden Sierra Job Training Agency in Grass Valley. We were able to hire a young man from Chico who stayed at his family's summer cabin. However, after less than one month he found he needed to return to Chico so we were once again without full time help. The dedicated volunteers held up very well and together we kept things going. The following people deserve acknowledgement and a gracious thanks:

Francie Brett	Maren Scholberg
Charity Clover	La Verne Monico
Linc and Billie Madsen	Margaret Burelle
Brad Mea	Rita Bradley
Betsy Cammack	Lois Keeler
Jack Hawkins	Barbara Martinetti

Special thanks to Jack Hawkins for helping with the tours and Charity Clover and La Verne Monico for providing wildflowers for the exhibit! The museum is always in need of volunteers to help at the desk. The park grounds, stamp mill and other structures are in need of help as well. If you are willing and able, please contact me at 862-1310. We will gladly welcome you to the group who support this special place.

The Kentucky Mine Concert Series has completed its third consecutive season and is finally making a name for itself. (See article from the Mountain Messenger). The concerts are a major addition to our operating budget and at the same time add to the local summer enjoyment. Nearly 1,300 people attended the nine performances. The numerous people who contributed to its success are greatly appreciated. We were fortunate to receive a grant from the California Arts Council and National Endowment for the Arts which helped pay a portion of costs for the group Swing Fever.

The September/October issue of Sierra Heritage magazine has a very positive article covering the museum and concert series under the heading "Outings" on pages 34-39. Well worth reading even without our publicity.

The following donations have been received this summer and are appreciated:

Two Geological Atlas a) Colfax folio 1900 b) Downieville folio 1897 from Ellis Weisker of Oakland. **Two Brass Drink Tokens** used at the Spellenberg Saloon from Scott Evens. **A Small Ingot Mold, Ceramic Crucible and a "Boss Head" Driver** from a local stamp mill, donated by Paul and Mary Bettencourt. **Two Leather Hinges** found in Sierra City by Bob Schneider. **A Chinese Coin** found in Alleghany by Kenneth Turner of Sacramento. Among the many items donated by La Verne Monico are **An Old Teakettle, Kitchen Thermometer, Button Hook for Ladies' Boots, A Schoolteacher's Baton, and A Collection of Wooden Sewing Bobbins**. Tim Beals donated a **Blueprint of a 20 Stamp Mill** built in 1900. Mary Nourse donated most of a **Plaster Rosette** from the historic Holly House, adding to the existing display. A 12-foot length of **Redwood Water Pipe** was donated by "Barney" Bozik. The **Pelton Wheel Powered Cord Wood Saw** used at the Fournier Ranch was donated by Charles K. Smith. **Two Mercury Flasks** came from an anonymous donor who left them by the front door of the museum. Thank you all!

The following donors have contributed to the Memorial Fund this summer; Marlin W. Haley in memory of Henry Tschopp, Arch and La Verne Monico in memory of Mary C. Cliff Johnson, Mrs. David White in honor of John R. Berger's 91st birthday!

The museum participated in the State Fair exhibit, which won a silver medal, by lending a pair of long "snowshoes," the map of Sierra County painted by Philip Newberg for the State Fair in 1940, and the quilt made by the Sierra City Fire Department Auxiliary. It was the first entry for the county in 25 years.

The museum will be opening especially for the Northern California Association of Supervisors who are scheduled for the tour and barbeque. Otherwise we will be open weekends only in October to end the season.

AVALANCHE!

Continued from Page 2

When the sound and movement outside began to decrease and my mother and I determined I was alive and unharmed (though a thick pine limb lay menacingly on my pillow with me), and the house still standing, the terror, too, began to subside. From that point on what I remember about the whole thing is tinted with excitement. This was some event! An avalanche! And right in our house! Strangely, I remember how pungent and fresh my room was from the alien mass of snow and the ripped branches of cedar, fir and pine heaped around and over me. With my mother's help, I unearthed myself from my heavy cold blanket of snow, evergreen branches, dirt, broken boards and glass and we went to take stock of the damage. The front door, too, had flown open from the force of the driven snow and our old fashioned front parlor was buried beneath a six-foot deep wedge of snow. Our two dogs were up near the ceiling, alive and excited. My mother had let them both out earlier, and it has always remained a mystery to us how they had survived — apparently riding the crest of the wave right into the house. After digging our way through the glut of snow filling the doorway, we climbed out onto a strangely changed landscape. We were standing at the height of the upper frames of our door and windows — at least ten feet above the ground. A massive field of snow lay all around us, filling the entire length of Church Street. In the field near the school and away from this fan edge, it had rolled to a stop in great waves at least twenty to twenty-five feet high. Heaped everywhere, as though a giant had used our fields for a rubble pile, entire pines, firs, cedars and oaks with their roots still intact lay helter-skelter in a quarter-mile square radius around the school.



The scene above us on Highway 49 was another shock. Nellie Wade's old house just above the highway (where Jim and Helen Austin's stands now) and fortunately vacant, was no longer there. Its triangular-shaped top half was now in our front yard and the bottom part scattered wildly up and down the twenty-foot-thick mass of snow that covered the highway — the route that most of the students took to school. Bathtub and toilet, pots and pans and chairs and tables lay at rakish angles. The avalanche had apparently careened into the bottom half, which had exploded as though hit by a bomb, while the top half had been lofted by force of wind and snow

across the highway and into our yard below. Walking gingerly up to its front upstairs window, I looked inside and saw bed and dresser only slightly out of place. Strangely, in the midst of that violent display of nature, the glass dresser top had flown across the room and lay unbroken on the bed, which was still perfectly made up with blankets and pillow.

The wind had died down by this time, and a distinctly eerie stillness seemed to hover over this devastation. Soon, people began to appear and we learned more about what destruction the avalanche had wrought.

Apparently it had begun below the Sierra Buttes in the western-most of the three ravines carved into the great flank of barren mountain above us. The unending snowfalls of the previous week had mounted to dangerous proportions, probably on old, frozen snow. The massive weight finally gave, hurtling down the mountain and gaining momentum and force as it gathered more and more snow like a giant snowball. Uprooting one-hundred foot trees and unearthing boulders, the avalanche had roared down the mountain, aimed directly at our old schoolhouse. This interesting old building consisted of three large rooms, all about the size of a gymnasium. The room that we were using as our main classroom then was the front one, nearest the highway. The avalanche had struck the front wall of the building, pushing in the bottom and leaving the top attached so that the effect was that of a row of large teeth smashed into a great gaping mouth but still hanging by their roots. All the desks were buried; some were contorted completely; others were simply squashed. The fate of our twenty-three students and our teacher, had we all been busily at work that morning, was easy enough to imagine.

Later that day people from the town insisted we move down to the Sierra Buttes Inn until it could be determined that the danger had passed. Some old-timers felt that the snow on the entire mountain might yet give way.

The heavy snows of that week had completely blocked both the highway up from Downieville and also from the east over the Yuba Pass. Other people were moved out of their homes into the Inn, Mr. Jones declared the school officially closed, and for the next two weeks the entire town enjoyed one of those rare communal times that occur so infrequently in modern society. Electricity and phones were out. People dug into their freezers and the whole town shared. My mother made endless loaves of bread in the big industrial oven at the Inn, other women came to help with the cooking, and we ate imaginative dinners by candlelight at a great long table in the hotel's dining room. Men went out in groups to shovel roofs in danger of collapsing from the enormous snow build-up, and we children had a wonderful extended Christmas vacation skiing, sledding and generally getting every ounce of fun from this unexpected adventure.

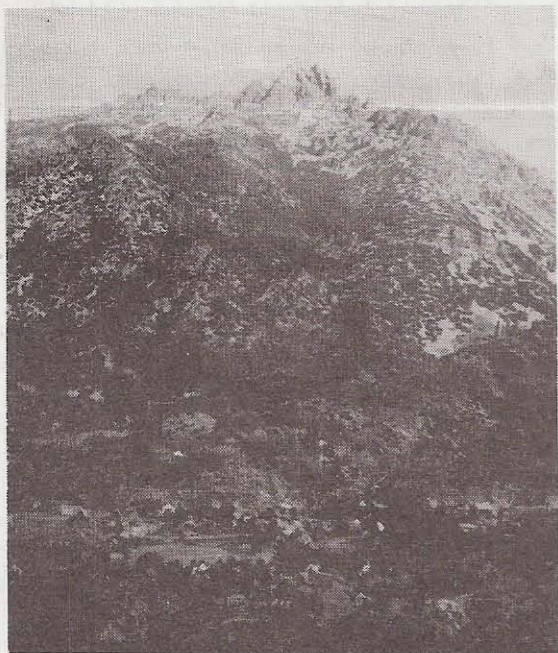
One of the more curious things that happened during this two week hiatus from normal reality was the affair of the giant S.O.S. One day well into these two weeks, a small plane flew low over Sierra City, circled a few times, then moved away over the ridges to the south. The townpeople got very excited. Maybe the outside world had discovered our plight and were coming to help! So far, the town had pulled together admirably, but the school teacher's wife was in her eighth month of pregnancy and Mrs. Sawyer was running low on insulin. Also running low was our supply of fresh food. A

group of people decided that if the plane came back, we should be prepared somehow to communicate our needs. That night, a group of enterprising men got together in the lobby of the old Zerloff hotel with a large roll of butcher paper and some paint and produced a message the length of a football field: "We need milk, bread, kerosene, paraffin [for waxing shovels]," etc. They stretched the sign across Goff's field downtown (where the trailer park is now) and we all waited expectantly for our rescuers to return. (Not that we children wanted this vacation to end, but a rescue plane landing in the middle of our town would have added greatly to the general sense of adventure.)

But the plane never returned. We learned later that it had been a Sacramento Bee plane on a photographic mission, the picture of our polar-bear houses duly published without any concern for our obvious predicament. So much for investigative reporting in the fifties.

Eventually, the rotary plow made its way through the twelve foot drifts to Sierra City and Mr. Jones got his wife out not a day too soon. As for me, the Avalanche Adventure in the mountains of my childhood will always be one of those memories that will still be good to mull over even into ripe old age when I sit rocking by the window in my intrepid old house in Sierra City, just counting the snowflakes.

Lydia Cartwright Rosen



The geography of an avalanche. The ravine on the far left was the channel that carried heavy snows and debris directly toward the Sierra City schoolhouse.

CONCERT SERIES A BIG HIT

By Lee Light

SIERRA CITY — The third annual Kentucky Mine Summer Concert Series ended in a roar of audience appreciation Friday, August 30th. This has been a most ambitious undertaking for the small community of Sierra City.

Bobby Webb's Smooth Blues Band was a fitting finish for the 1991 season. In spite of being delayed by heavy Labor Day Weekend traffic, this San Francisco based group took only a few minutes to set up their equipment and begin their program.

The six piece band's experience and talent was immediately evident. They started off with a bang and kept up a fast pace to the end — and never missed a beat.

Blues was their specialty and they play every known kind of blues with a large dose of improvisation thrown in for good measure.

The audience took no time to get into the groove with the band. Few could sit still — swaying to the beat of the music as Bobby Webb led the band and played a very sweet sax.

The concert series has been the highlight of the summer with the many visitors to the area.

As a rule when people attend a small community affair such as this they don't expect too much, but each program was well done and very professional. A wide variety of talented entertainers were brought in and even a torrential early summer rain storm didn't stop the show.

The community effort of putting together a series of this magnitude must be commended. The series was sponsored in part by the California Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts. However it was the efforts of people like Liz Fisher, Karen Donaldson, Dennis Messa and Carole and Renetta Hays who coordinated the series which made it a success.

The Sierra County Historical Society hosted the series at the Kentucky Mine Amphitheatre. All proceeds from the concert series go to the maintenance of Kentucky Mine County Park.

A special salute must be paid to Sierra City Antiques who provided flowers and plants for most of the concerts. Each concert was decorated according to the theme of the performance or the holiday of the performance.

For the Fourth of July, the stage was banked with plants and hanging ferns. Many American flags added color along with red, white, blue and yellow flowers.

The night for cowboy poetry and folk music, the stage was set in a western theme with a saddle and blankets, bales of hay, an old wagon wheel and of course many plants and flowers.

The people of Sierra City can be very proud of themselves.



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



A special thanks to Howard Landers, our typesetter, for the patience, contributions and fine work. Without him, the Sierran would not be what it is today. Thank you, Howard.

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The following people are LIFE MEMBERS:

Sylvester Bozik of Downieville, CA
 Francie Brett of Downieville, CA
 Joanne Busch of Ridgecrest, CA
 Earl Collins of Seattle, WA
 Lou Cooper of Vista, CA
 William G. Copren of Sattley, CA
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 Rosemary F. Schamburg of Fairway, KS
 Frank Tabor of Downieville, CA
 Betsy Thompson of Downieville, CA
 Sophie Tschopp of Sierra City, CA
 Ellis R. Weisker of Oakland, CA

We are pleased to have these local businesses as members:

Cirino's at the Forks of Downieville
 Dickey Exploration Co., Inc. of Alleghany
 Golden West Saloon of Loyalton
 High Country Inn of Sierra City
 Leonards of Loyalton
 The Ruffled Goose of Downieville
 Sandra Dyer's Resort Motel of Downieville
 Sierra-Plumas Realty of Sierra City

SIERRA VALLEY MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Results of a marketing study made by Dick Lyons of Los Angeles show that it is feasible to have a museum of natural history for Sierra Valley. The next step is to send the document to the state. As soon as they approve it, a search for grant money will be made to cover the cost of the first phase of the building.

After the death of Jim Lonergan of Loyalton in July, the Board agreed to continue with the plans for which Jim had worked so hard. He had provided the energy which spear-headed the project. The Board hopes to carry through on his idea and wishes for such a museum which will be of interest to all and which will be a great educational tool for the children.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Great things are happening! Are you a part of it? If not, why not? Again I want to thank our faithful few volunteers. We have just finished another season at the museum and another concert series at the amphitheater.

Our October meeting will be in Sierraville and will be a potluck. Our hard-working treasurer, Maren Scholberg, has promised a speaker of special interest to the Eastern Sierra County people. Y'all come, y'hear.



Sierra City post office during winter of 1919.

SINNOTT BOOK RE-PRINTED

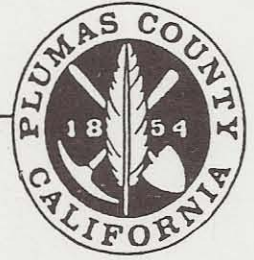
It has been almost twenty years since James Sinnott published *Downieville – Gold Town of the Yuba*. The historian wrote five more volumes before completing his history of Sierra County. All titles are out-of-print. All titles are collectors items. More than likely, Mr. Sinnott did not begin the project with this in mind. However, enduring works express themselves over time. Readers are the ultimate judges.

Downieville – Gold Town of the Yuba is an extensive historical work of 428 pages, illustrated throughout with photographs, maps and early newspaper reproductions. A hardbound, limited edition will be published by Mountain House Books of Nevada City.

Mr. Sinnott has authorized the addition of an index to accompany the text. The book will sell for \$50.00. Pre-publication orders are encouraged since this edition will be strictly limited. For information contact Karen Donaldson at the Kentucky Mine Museum, 916-862-1310 or the publisher Mountain House Books, 418 Broad Street, Nevada City, CA 95959 – 916-265-0241.

Note: We are in need of more volunteers to draw from. Please contact me at the museum if you have any free time and like working with the public. This can be a lot of fun as well as gratifying to support our worthy cause.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS



P.O. BOX 10207, QUINCY, CA 95971 (916) 283-6305 or (916) 283-6315

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RE: Beckwourth Cabin

We're happy to invite you to the formal dedication of his newly refurbished hotel and trading post (c. 1852) on Grizzly Creek, above the Middle Fork of the Feather River at the mouth of the Sierra Valley, on Friday, October 4, 1991 at 9:00 A.M.

The dedication is the result of an eight year effort to first move and now restore this oldest building in Plumas County.

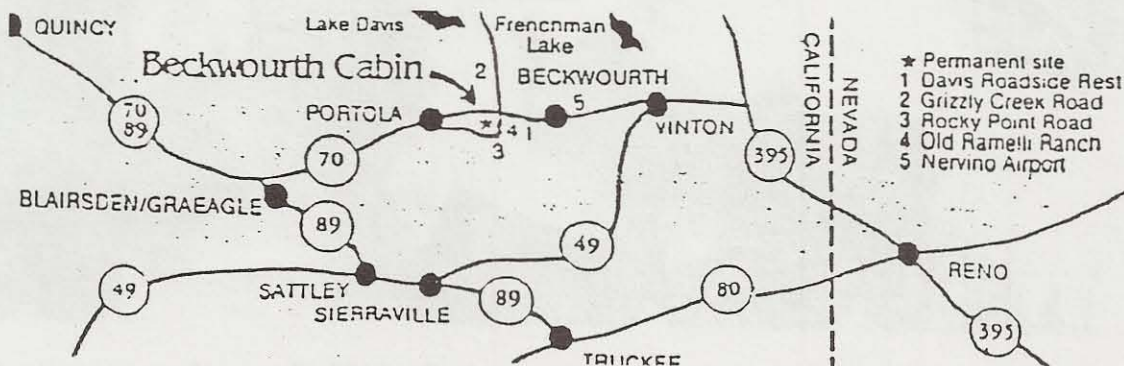
The dedication will be attended by various local and state dignitaries, historical aficionados, Clampers, Native Daughters, black powder enthusiasts, as well as participants in the first Trans Sierra Mountain Bike Tour.

The bike tour will trace the 150 mile wagon road Beckwourth pioneered from his nearby Sierran Pass to Marysville in 1851 and will commence immediately after the dedication.

A tour of the cabin and its artifacts will be held after the dedication.

If you are interested in coming, please call John Sheehan at 916-283-2466 or leave a message.

Beckwourth Cabin



Sierra County Historical Society



Aerial photo of downtown Sierra City during the winter of 1951-52. Courtesy Sacramento Bee