

THE SIERRAN

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FROM MEMORIES TO REALITY: A RETURN TO THE PAST

By Paul L. Peoples

For this story the Past is indeed, Prologue!

My early memories as an only child in the 1930's, growing up in the jumbled hills of western Pennsylvania, are of my immediate family, many aunts, uncles and cousins, and exciting days at my grandparents' farm. The Great Depression was a fact of life dictating frugality, hard work and neighborly support.

Even to this day, however, the most vivid memories

are of the stories told by my parents about their travels in the West. Places like Yellowstone, Butte, Reno, Downieville, Sierra City, Truckee and Alleghany came alive in my dreams. They spoke of Blackie, their cat; gold mines like the Wonder and Sixteen-to-One and a hard-nosed character named Pete Flowers (I later learned it was probably "Fleurers"). The stories were reinforced with worn and faded photos and became fixed in my mind.

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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, holds quarterly meetings, publishes a semi-annual newsletter and conducts historical research. Members are sent notices of Society activities, receive *The Sierran* 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, DIRECTORS and STAFF

President.....	Speranza Avram
Vice President.....	Arnold Gutman
Treasurer.....	Renetta Hayes
Secretary.....	William Copren
Directors.....	Rita Bradley, Robert Canby, William Long
Membership Chair.....	Maren Scholberg
Museum Curator.....	Karen Donaldson
<i>Sierran</i> Production Staff.....	Dave Bloch, Karen Donaldson

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the Sierra County Historical Society is open to any interested person, business or organization. Members need not be residents of Sierra County. Dues are due and payable each January for the calendar year.

Membership categories are as follows:

INDIVIDUAL	\$10.00
FAMILY	\$15.00
SCHOOL & LIBRARY	\$15.00
BUSINESS & SUPPORTING	\$25.00
SUSTAINING	\$50.00
LIFE (per individual)	\$250.00

Please send dues to the Membership Chair:

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by *Speranza Avram*

1994 is shaping up to be a terrific season! First of all, we need to welcome two new members of the Board of Directors, Bill Copren and Robert Canby. Most of you know Bill—he's been a long-time and very active member of the Historical Society (and past President of the Board). Glad to have you back on Board, Bill! Bob Canby lives in Sierra City with his wife Carol. He is recently retired from the State Parks Department, where he managed interpretation projects and coordinated volunteer docents. We're very lucky to have someone with Bob's skills in our organization.

Judy Miller continues to work hard on organizing our financial records. We had a successful year in 1993, and the Society is in strong financial shape.

My goal for 1994 is to involve more volunteers in the various projects sponsored by the Historical Society. There are a number of ways YOU can get involved, from working at the Museum, helping out the Concert Series, or encouraging your friends to join our organization. To learn how you can get involved, call Karen at 862-1310. Thank you!

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**HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS
around California**

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management will sponsor a Placerville-to-Georgetown field conference/tour on May 21. CEU credits available thru CSU. Call Dr. Gregg Wilkerson at (805) 391-6081 for information.

"Remains to be Seen," the 1994 annual conference of the California Historical Society and California Council for the Promotion of History will be held in San Diego September 15—18. Call (415) 567-1848.

KENTUCKY MINE MUSEUM NEWS *by Karen Donaldson, Curator*

Spring is arriving! With it comes the flurry of activity in anticipation of opening day, May 28.

With the help of Bob and Carol Canby, we are creating a Docent Training Program. Bob and Carol spent numerous years with the California State Parks at Bodie and Malakoff Diggins, and bring with them professional expertise in docent training and management. We will actually have a *manual* to assist the volunteers who have in the past been asked to largely "wing it" behind the desk. We are also moving into the modern world with a computerized cash register. No more tally sheets!

The Sierra County Replica Gold Collection will be on display at the museum one more summer. Not the real thing but close—it has been very popular.

I would like to thank Betsy Cammack who has graciously offered to answer correspondence of a genealogical nature. Judy Miller has been of invaluable assistance this winter with everything from the dreaded filing and paperwork to computer data entry and generating project reports. I can't thank her enough.

Our annual spring work party days have been scheduled for April 23 and 24. We plan to do the usual raking, sweeping, dusting, carpet cleaning, window washing, minor painting and light carpentry.

The 6th Annual Spring Fever Dance & Cajun Barbecue with Mumbo Gumbo, will be held at the Park on Mother's Day, May 8. This event was held outdoors with the barbecue for the first time last year and was a lot of fun as well as a successful fundraiser for the museum. The band has become a local favorite and recently performed to a sell-out crowd of 1,600 at John Ascuaga's Nugget in Sparks, Nevada.

The Concert Series schedule for this summer follows and we are very pleased with the high quality of music and entertainment. Season tickets are available now through June 30th for a bargain rate of \$65.00 for ten tickets which can be used singly or in any combination. This series is a real support for the museum.

DONATIONS

Since our last issue, the museum has received the following donations:

A **Kodak Carousel 650 slide projector with zoom lens and carrying case** from Wallerich Design Associates in San Rafael. I was recently asked to give a slide presentation in February to the Portola Rotary. I had a great time, a great dinner and judging from the questions afterward the presentation was well received. Now we can do this kind of thing more often.

A **collection of memorabilia** from the Wesfall-Fournier family donated by Winona Falla of Cedar Ridge. Included are **photo albums, autograph books, prayer books, personal letters** and a **nightgown made for Evelyne Fournier's honeymoon in 1915.**

A **postcard** from the collection of Richard E. Kremer of Foxboro, Massachusetts. Imprinted with "The American Mining & Development Co.," it also says,

A portion of one of the water falls at the property of the AM&D Co. Sierra County California 1908. Not more than six white men have probably ever seen these falls. It is a precipitous drop of 1,200 feet on either side to get to them.

Does anyone know where these falls are?

A **drill steel, two picks** and some **square nails** from Dana Beach of Laguna Niguel. They were found while dredging in the North Yuba River below Loganville.

From the Calaveras County Historical Society in San Andreas, a remarkable hardbound **book**, *Report on the Kate Hardy Mine, Alleghany—Forest District, Sierra County*. The consulting mining engineer was George H. MacDonald and it was published November 12, 1941. Mention is made of the Brush Creek, Sixteen-to-One, Oriental, Gold Star, Rainbow, North Fork and Plumbago mines.

From Donald Ray of Belmont, **three issues of *The Mountain Messenger*** dated October 22, 1898; July 15, 1899 and July 22, 1899. Mr. Ray does genealogical work and his wife's ancestors lived in Sierra City in 1900.

Also received, an interesting **article** from the *San Francisco Chronicle* dated June 14, 1953 entitled "Sierra County—Mines at Rest, Mills at Work."

Roy Cooper of Sierra City donated some **paint** so we can do the necessary touch-up repairs.

And the Sierra County Arts Council donated **staff time and assistance** in production of promotional materials for the 1994 Summer Concert Series.

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Continued from Page 1

MY PARENTS' STORY

My father, Paul Revere Peoples, was born in 1900, the eighth of ten children born to Nathan and Nora Peoples. "Nate" was a lumberman and sometimes farmer who eventually settled on a farm near Big Run, Pennsylvania. My mother, Elva Lillian (Buchheit) was born in 1902, the second of nine children of Phillip and Lillian (Rimer) Buchheit. They too resided on a farm near Big Run that had been in the Buchheit family since 1823.

My mother graduated from high school and attended Clarion State Normal School, a teachers' college. Although he did not complete high school, my father went on to study in the new field of electrical power generation and motor repair at schools in Chicago, Reading and Valparaiso.

Following their marriage in 1924 and completion of my father's education, he traveled extensively, learning and practicing his profession. During this period, he learned to fly and in later years did a bit of "barnstorming." Wiley Post (later killed in a crash with Will Rogers) was a friend and his idol. He also claimed to have taken a few lessons from a struggling young pilot named Charles A. Lindbergh—before Lindbergh achieved fame in the Spirit of St. Louis.

In August of 1926, my parents headed for California. A diary kept by my mother described their eighteen-day trip to California. She spoke of the drought in Iowa, mud in Nebraska, ferries across the Platte River, the beauty of Old Faithful, the stench of the sulfur springs, the blistering heat of the Nevada desert, the splendor of the Sierra and the lush valleys beyond. The family settled in Oakland, where my father went to work for the firm of Kinney and Brown.

In 1927 they moved to Alleghany where he became superintendent of the Wonder Mine. Photos of the time show construction of buildings at the entrance to the mine. One photo, reproduced on Page 1, shows my father standing next to Pete Flowers at the mine portal.

They left Alleghany in December, 1927 to return to Pennsylvania. Mother noted that, on New Year's Day, 1928, they found themselves in Pasadena, caught in Rose Bowl traffic! (A portent of things to come...)



Paul and Elva Peoples, 1924

By the end of 1928, my father owned a rapidly growing electrical repair business in Franklin, Pennsylvania, but the crash of 1929 and the Depression that followed destroyed the business. My parents returned to Big Run, purchased a home and land and began the long but successful task of rebuilding their business. I came along in 1931 and learned most of what is related here in the next ten or twelve years.

Adolescence, college and military service interfered with further discussion of my family's history. My father's paralyzing stroke in 1954 and my mother's subsequent battle with cancer led to their deaths in 1966 and 1967, respectively.

Seldom did we speak of those earlier, happier years. My link to the past was gone.

Despite the passage of years, the stories of California and the Sierra remained, and in 1992, now retired, I decided to search for and retrieve, at least in part, some of my family history.

RELIVING THE PAST

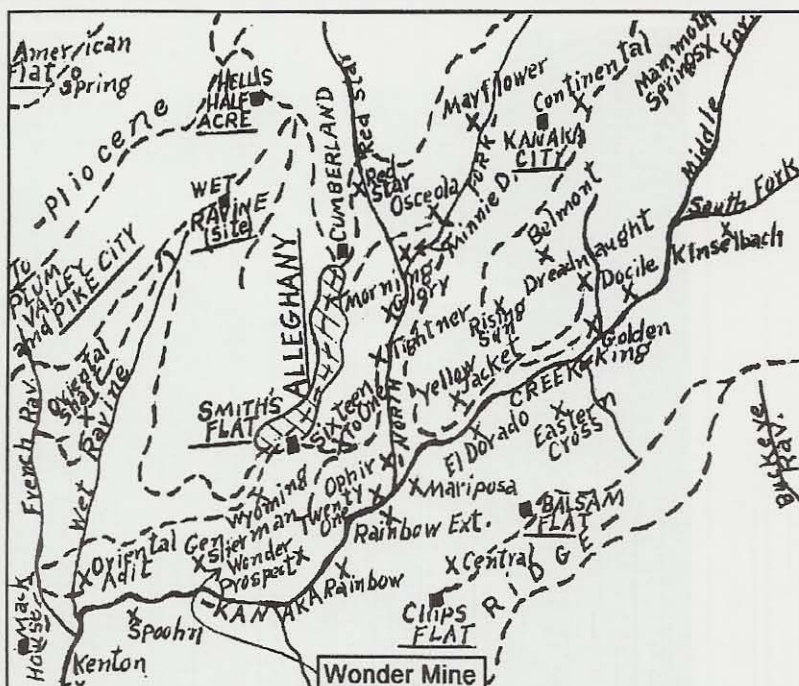
Armed with a few maps, photos, and travel suggestions from Karen Donaldson, Curator of the Kentucky Mine Museum in Sierra City, I left Lansing, Michigan for Reno, Nevada. After renting a 4-wheel-drive vehicle, I headed west up through

Truckee to Sierraville and across the Sierra Valley. As the road climbed up and over the Yuba Pass to Sierra City, with the crystal waters of the North Yuba River at my left and the majestic Sierra Buttes in the background, sixty-year-old visions were becoming reality. Finally, Downieville, the county seat for Sierra County and the place where I hoped to learn more about the Wonder Mine.

My initial inquiries into the Wonder at the County Clerk-Recorder's office in Downieville were fruitless, and a search of land records added little. I did learn that the name had been changed to the Gold Crown Mine, although I could find no information about location, current ownership or the names of people who had been associated with the mine in the twenties. The fact that I am a novice in this type of research probably contributed to my lack of success.

The Clerk, sensing my frustration, offered a book by James J. Sinnott on the history of Alleghany and Forest City (*Alleghany and Forest City: Treasure Towns*, California Traveler, Inc., Volcano, CA 1975). I found a few paragraphs about the Gold Crown (formerly the Wonder) but nothing related to my quest. Then, while leafing through the pages, a familiar picture—my father standing next of Pete Flowers in front of the Wonder Mine! The photo was identical to the one I had carried with me that my parents brought back from California in 1928. The people in the photo were not identified and the date cited was a few years off, but it was the Wonder and the man in the picture was my father. The caption indicated that the photo had been provided by David O'Donnell (son of Philip and Adeline O'Donnell).

With this information at hand, I continued on from Downieville to Goodyears Bar and then, by way of a "short cut" up the Mountain House Road, to Alleghany. The road, although reasonably well maintained, was dirt, single lane (a few encounters with oncoming traffic were exciting), and clinging somewhat precariously to the sides of many very high, steep mountains. Numerous forks in the road and a shortage of markers tested my navigational skill—not great, based on the number of backtracks I had to make.

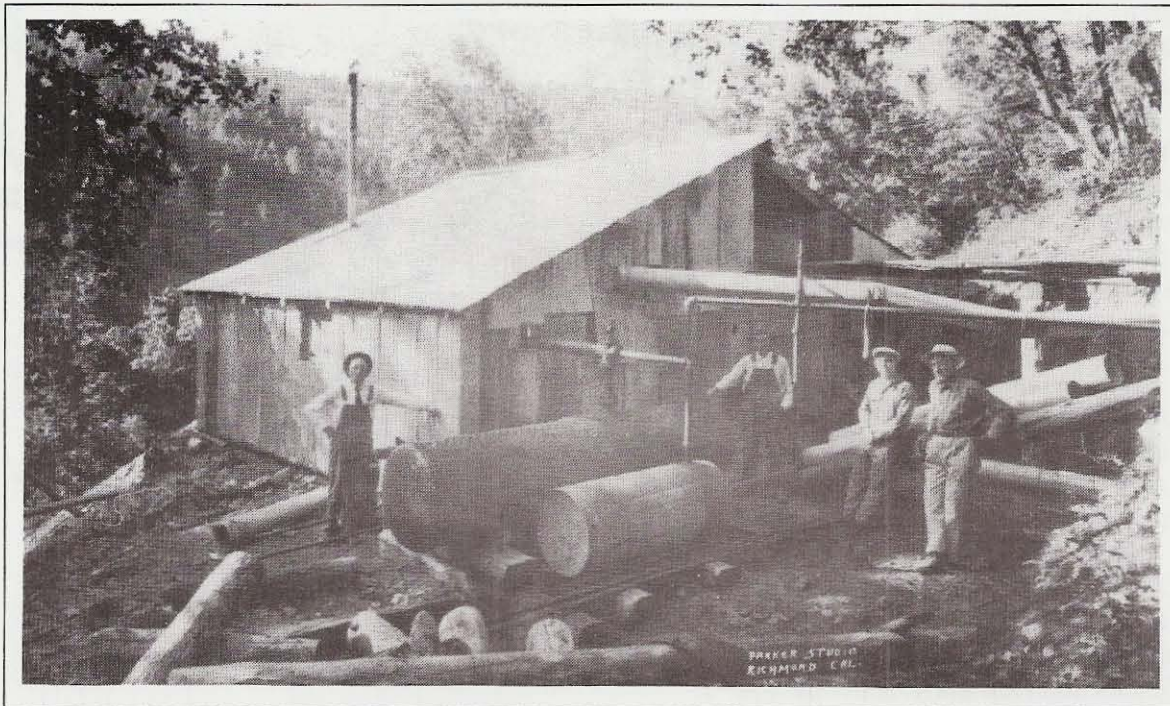


Map of Alleghany area showing Wonder Mine
(from Sinnott, "Alleghany and Forest City")

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GOLD CROWN (WONDER) MINE

This mine, southwest of the Sixteen-to-One about a third of a mile, was originally operated as the Wonder Mine. H.T. Bradbury, the Flynn Brothers, and the estate of J. Walsh had done considerable work by 1922. The Sierra Wonder Company drove a lower tunnel in the middle of 1920's, and in the late 1930's members of the Duke Family operated the mine, starting an upper tunnel above where the Bradbury and the Flynn had worked. They also sunk a shaft.

In work following the end of World War II this shaft was deepened by the Wonder Mining Company. In 1949-50 the company was reincorporated as the Gold Crown Mining Corporation, with this company deepening the shaft and doing some tunnel work. The Giles Brothers from 1951 into 1954, who were development contractors for the Gold Crown Corporation, did extensive work on the north 100-foot level and in the lower tunnel. Some high grade ore was found. (from Sinnott, "Alleghany and Forest City: Treasure Towns")



*Engine & Compressor House at the Wonder Mine, about 1920
(from Sinnott; collection of Philip and Adeline O'Donnell)*

Finally, the tiny mining town of Alleghany, population 121. Soon I had found my lodging for the next few days, the Kenton Mine Lodge. Being early in the season, I was the only guest and had the chance to talk at length with my host. I mentioned the photograph I had seen in the Sinnott book and was surprised to learn that the O'Donnell's lived in Alleghany. The next day I went to visit them.

Philip O'Donnell was in the final stage of restoring a vintage truck to better-than-new condition. It ran like a sewing machine and even had air conditioning (the windshield opened—two positions!). He also rebuilt old radios and had one of the largest collections of rock drills in the country.

As I described my connection to Alleghany and the Wonder Mine, I mentioned the photo of my father and Pete Flowers. Adeline looked incredulous and asked what I knew about Mr. Flowers. Other than the fact that he was in some way connected with the Wonder, my only other recollection was that he used to place his slab of bacon under his mattress. To my surprise, Adeline confirmed this rather unusual trait. Apparently, Pete felt that his dinner would stay cooler there.

The O'Donnell's went on to explain that they had known Pete Flowers and that he had also been

connected to the Dreadnought Mine now owned by the O'Donnells. Pete died in the early 1950's.

My two new friends then located the caretaker for the Wonder/Gold Crown, Dave Jeffrey, and arranged for me to make a visit. To my surprise, the shaft opening was very similar to the old photos and a major part of the outbuildings appeared to be the identical wood-framed metal-covered ones shown under construction in my early photographs.

I attempted to locate the place from which some old panoramic pictures of Alleghany, the Wonder and the Sixteen-to-One had been taken. The spot was across the valley, probably in the Chips Flat area. However, seventy years of growth had largely obscured the valley and the mines.

Later, I explored the buildings and remaining machinery of several mines, including the Kenton. The ability of the early miners to build such complex facilities in this rugged terrain staggers the imagination. Massive sixteen-inch square timbers and machinery weighing many tons had been transported to and erected in the most inhospitable places. I was impressed!

The people, too, have my respect and remind me a great deal of my boyhood home in rural Pennsyl-

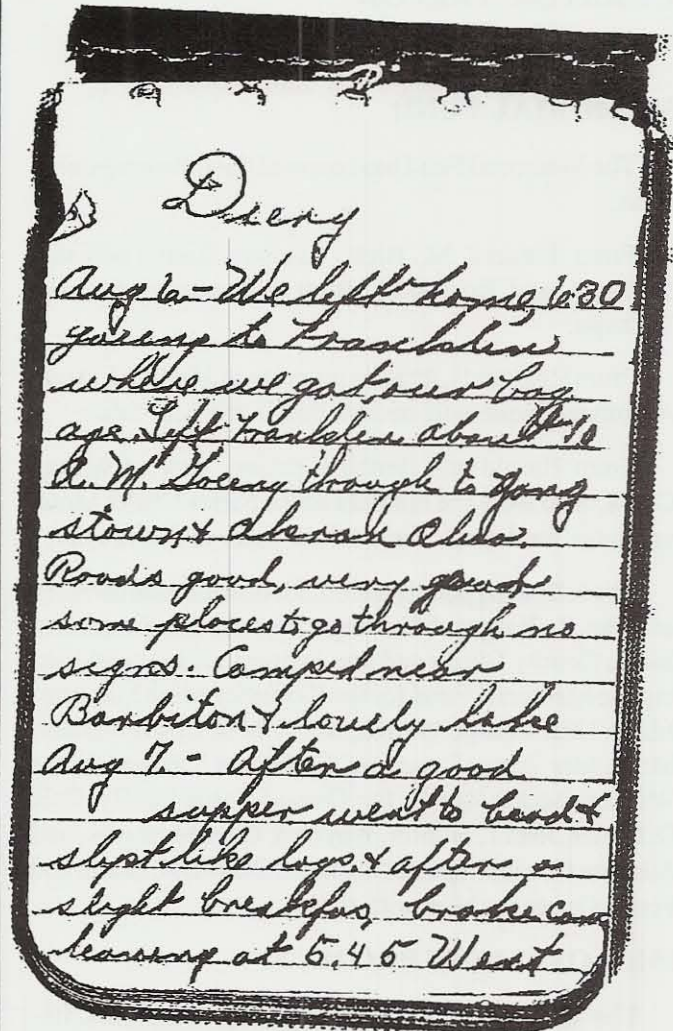


Paul R. Peoples, near Alleghany, 1927

vania. There are some unusual contrasts as well. Although the nearest gas station and supermarket are many miles away, they have the most modern microwave telephone system. Most importantly, the people, although a bit aloof and skeptical of strangers, were very friendly and helpful to me. By way of contrast, while at the Kenton Lodge, I watched by satellite television the live "feeds" from the reporters in the field during the Los Angeles riots. That is contrast!

I left Alleghany with a feeling of satisfaction and a promise to myself that I would visit here again. En route back to Michigan, I stopped and visited Yellowstone National Park. As my mother had written many years ago, Old Faithful is spectacular and the sulfur springs do stink. Things don't really change much, do they?

Paul L. Peoples is a retired Air Force Colonel with numerous decorations. He recently retired from Michigan State University where he was Director of Corporate Relations and a former faculty member in the School of Packaging. Paul presently serves as Executive Director for the Packaging Alumni Association and as an Adjunct Professor in the MSU School of Packaging.



First page of the Diary of Elva Peoples, beginning August 6, 1926:

"We left home, 6:30
going to Franklin
where we got our bag-
gage. Left Franklin about 10
A.M. Goeing though to Yong-
stown & Akron Ohio.
Roads good, very good
some places to go through no
signs. Camped near
Barbiton & lovely lake.
Aug 7.—After a good
supper went to bead &
slept like logs & after a
slight breakfas, broke camp
leaving at 5.45..."

CURATOR'S REPORT

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MEMORIAL FUND

The Memorial Fund has received the following donations:

From Frances M. Brett, Lindsay Brett Harbison, Walter J. and Russell H. Brett in memory of Henry Tschopp.

From Reginald Littrell in memory of Marilyn Littrell. A bronze plaque will be installed in the near future.

From Harold and Bertha Kerrison, now of Walnut Creek, who were the builders of the Sierra Chalet Motel and have fond memories of their years in Sierra City.

The following people have made donations in memory of John R. Berger. Mr. Berger was from a prominent Sierra County family and was instrumental in establishing the Memorial Fund for the Kentucky Mine Museum: Mr. & Mrs. George Warren, Mr. & Mrs. Lewis Nessler, Mr. & Mrs. James Laughton, Catherine T. Hancock, the William Becker family, the Donald Carter family, Dale D. Carter, Jean T. Hunter, Wayne & Gaye Momerak, and Julianne Gordon. Special thanks to Charles K. Smith and Frank Carter for help with this.

IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The latest report on the Kentucky Mine Park Improvement Project funded by the State Parks & Recreation Department is that after four years we can expect to see the mine portal retimbered and lighted this year. Tim Beals, Sierra County Director of Public Works, expressed optimism that the improvements can be completed by the end of May. We will also see enhanced pathway lighting, trestle repair and water system improvements.

Remember that the important volunteer positions are waiting for *you*! Help support our efforts to keep Sierra County's history alive. Especially needed: someone interested in advertising and promotion. Also, if you have always wanted to be a tour guide, now is the perfect time to follow through. Please contact me at the museum: 862-1310.

Happy Spring, Everyone!

1994 CONCERT SERIES SCHEDULE

Programs for this year's Kentucky Mine Summer Concert Series are in the mail. For *Sierran* readers, here's a preview:

July 1—PAST DUE AND PLAYABLE Nevada County's premier bluegrass group returns with a new CD release of original music, "Bluegrass With Interest."

July 8—KARAMANTA JAMUYKU The traditional and hauntingly beautiful music of the Andes. The group's name means "We have come from far away."

July 15—CHRIS SMITHER Best known as a songwriter, Chris Smither has proven to also be an astonishing performer. Bonnie Raitt has recorded a number of his songs. An acoustic Blues virtuoso.

July 22—PAMELA ROSE and THE NATE GINSBERG TRIO Pamela Rose does justice to her original songs and classics by Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, Cab Calloway and Louis Prima. This band really swings!

July 29—THE ACOUSTICATS More "newgrass" than bluegrass! Their new CD release is "The Cats' Meow." Guaranteed entertainment.

August 5—SOURDOUGH SLIM and KAY HANSEN You won't have to be a buckaroo to enjoy this double bill! Slim's captivating music and superb showmanship create an infectious good time. Kay Hansen, many years with "Cabin Fever, has been called "California's Belle of the Gold Country."

August 12—LAURA SPITZER Laura and her Steinway grand return to Sierra City. Her extraordinary musical ability and her fireside chat approach to concertizing will win your heart.

August 19—ALASDAIR FRASER with BARBARA MacDONALD MAGONE Traditional Scottish fiddle music, from old Celtic aires to reels and jigs. Expert accompaniment on piano. A journey through the history and lore behind the tunes.

August 26—CATS & JAMMERS Vastly talented trio brings musical acumen, period authenticity, vocal harmonies and wry irreverance.

September 2—OUR BOYS STEEL ORCHESTRA This nine-member group from Trinidad and Tobago (not all boys!) will be returning to share their music of the West Indies. The group's combination of musical talent and genuine joy make "Our Boys" a truly GRAND FINALE!