

# THE SIERRAN

A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society  
*a member of the California Conference of Historical Societies*

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Volume XXIII, Number 2

Fall/Winter 1995

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A Special Issue of *The Sierran*:

## THE HISTORICAL MUSEUMS OF SIERRA COUNTY



*Postcard of the Sierra Buttes from Bassett's, circa 1930. Historical Society collection.*

Recently, several new historical museums have opened throughout Sierra County. In this issue of *The Sierran*, we are pleased to introduce our readers to these varied collections which portray facets of Sierra County's history.

The Maidu and Washoe Indians were the first residents of this area of the Sierra Nevada. Gold in the mountains and valleys slashed by the forks of the North and Middle Yuba Rivers was so plentiful that by April 16, 1852 Sierra County seceded from Yuba County. By the mid-1850's, Downieville, the County Seat, was California's fifth-largest town. It missed becoming the state capital by one vote in the legislature!

Sierra County is comprised of two very different regions. On the west side of the Sierra crest it is mountainous and heavily forested, therefore supporting miners and loggers. Along the southwestern border lie the towns of Alleghany, Pike City and Forest City and the richest goldbearing ores of the County. On the east side is the 5,000-foot elevation Sierra Valley, one of the largest valleys in the Sierra Nevada. Its population has been devoted to cattle-raising and farming since 1853.

The settlers who remained after the euphoria of the Gold Rush era was over were a hardy and independent breed. Today, Sierra County is home to slightly over 3,000 souls—no less fiercely independent—who cherish a land of incomparable beauty.



## 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!

### 1995 OFFICERS, DIRECTORS and STAFF

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

## MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

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 & INSTITUTION	\$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 REPORT

by Speranza Avram

It is with mixed feelings that I write my last column as President of the Sierra County Historical Society. On one hand, I am extremely pleased with the election of the Society's new Board members and wish I had the time to work with them on this year's projects. On the other hand, business commitments make it impossible for me to devote the time necessary to give the Society the attention it deserves.

The Sierra County Historical Society plays a critical role in preserving and interpreting Sierra County's history. The Kentucky Mine and Museum is a unique resource in our community. I want to say a special thank you to all of the volunteers who contribute time and money to keep the Museum open and operating.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the hard work and dedication shown by Director Karen Donaldson. Her tireless energy is what keeps the Society, the Museum and the Summer Concert Series on track. I wish the new Board of Directors "Good Luck" as they work to meet the new year's challenges.

## SPRING 1996 EVENTS

**March 10:** Sierra County Historical Society Membership Meeting and Potluck Luncheon, 1 p.m., Sierra City Community Hall. Speaker: Richard Deis, Tahoe National Forest Archaeologist.

**April:** Concert Series programs available. Season tickets available through June.

**May (early):** Museum, Park grounds, Amphitheater spring cleanup work party.

**May 12:** Spring Fever Dance and Cajun Barbecue featuring northern California's premiere dance band *Mumbo Gumbo*.

**May (later):** Spring issue of *The Sierran* featuring "The History of Prosser Ranch" by Lauren Ranz.

**May 25:** Kentucky Mine Museum Opening Day.

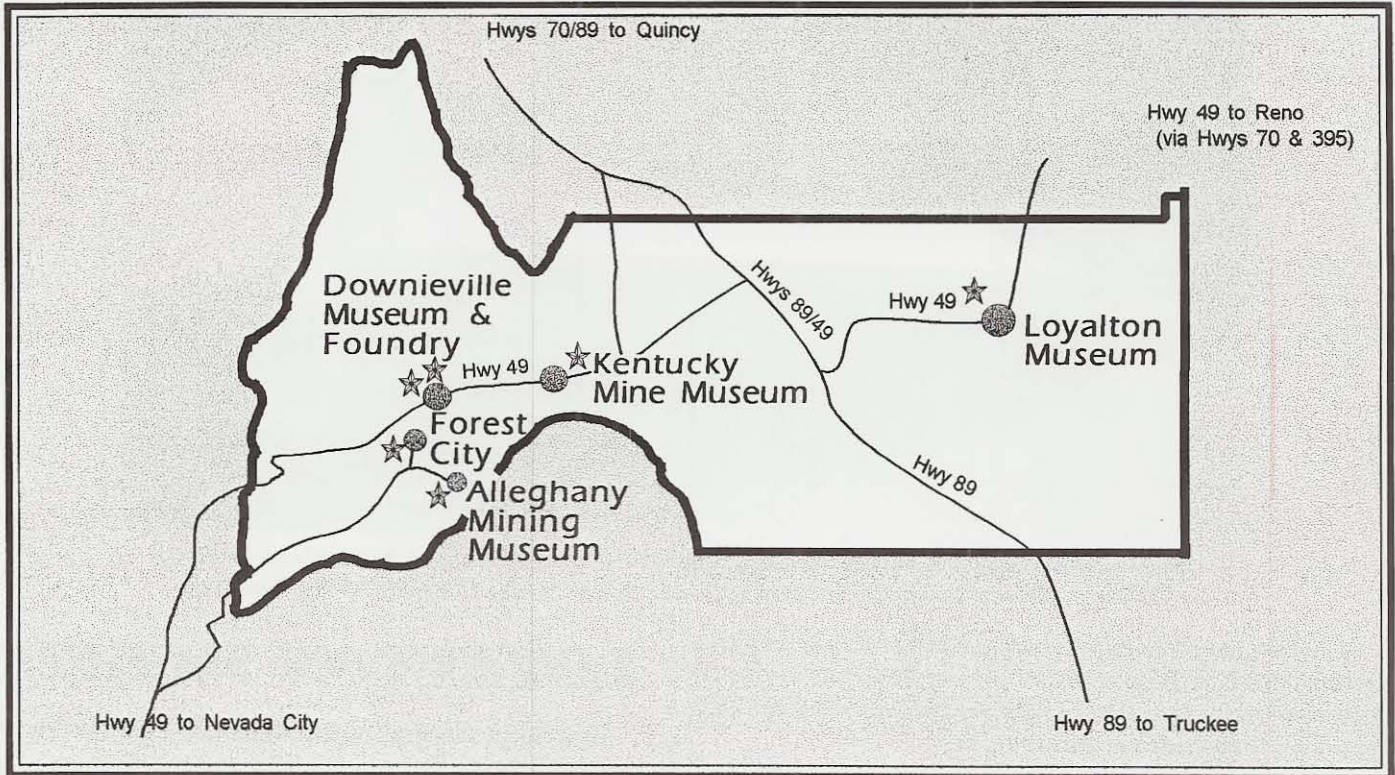
**Late Spring or Summer:** Sierra County Historical Society meeting and tour at Prosser Ranch.

**July 5:** 10th Kentucky Mine Summer Concert Series opening night.



# HISTORICAL MUSEUMS OF SIERRA COUNTY

A special issue of *The Sierran*, published Fall 1995 by the Sierra County Historical Society



*Fascinated by stories of the California Gold Rush? Searching for places that really haven't changed much in a hundred years? Interested in how gold was mined in the 1850's, and how it is still being mined today?*

*The historical museums of Sierra County await those with a deep appreciation of history, as well as families looking for interesting places to visit. The mountain lifestyle of Sierra County will make you feel closer to the halcyon days of the Gold Rush than you might imagine. To bring the articles you read in *The Sierran* to life, plan to visit us soon!*

## HOW TO GET HERE:

Sierra County can be reached from Sacramento and the Bay Area by taking Interstate 80 to the Highway 49 exit at Auburn, and then following 49 north beyond Grass Valley, Nevada City and North San Juan.

From Reno, visitors should drive north on U.S. 395 to Highway 70. Follow 70 west to Highway 49 at Vinton and turn left on to southbound Highway 49.

## SPECIFIC DIRECTIONS:

**Forest City:** The town is reached via the Pliocene Ridge Road, which intersects Hwy 49 in Yuba County at mile YUB-1.7. Drive up the Ridge Road past historic Pike City for 15 miles, and watch for a paved road on the left. Follow this road about one mile to the town.

**Alleghany Mining Museum:** Back at the intersection with the road to Forest City, drive southeast another 4 miles

to Alleghany, then through town to the Museum. (Look for "Alleghany Supply Co." on the front of the building.)

**Downieville Museum and Foundry:** Downieville is located on Hwy 49 at mile marker SIE-17. The Museum is situated on Main Street, just a few steps up from where 49 crosses the Downie River. The Foundry is located across the Downie River on Pearl Street. (Ask for a walking tour map of Downieville at any Downieville business.)

**Kentucky Mine Museum:** The Kentucky Mine is located on Hwy 49 at mile SIE-30, one mile north of "downtown" Sierra City. Watch for signs on the highway.

**Loyaltan Museum:** On Hwy 49 in Loyaltan (mile SIE-61), watch for the blue signs for Sierra County route A24. Follow A24 north to the edge of town. The Museum is located in the Loyaltan Community Hall, which is just past Loyaltan Elementary School (the School has a large sign out front).



# Historical Museums of Sierra County

## ALLEGHANY MINING MUSEUM



Mountain Messenger photo. Used by permission.

*The Alleghany Supply Company building, originally a livery stable and the town's general and grocery store until recently, has been prepared to serve as the Alleghany Mining Museum.*

The Alleghany Mining Museum is under development with the sponsorship of the Original Sixteen to One Mine. In its first year it sponsored educational tours of the mine and is now raising funds for exhibit research and construction.

This special place gives people a taste of backwoods mining-town life both as it was and as it is today. Visitors have the unique opportunity to actually explore a working underground gold mine, rubbing elbows with real gold miners. These miners feel a direct link with their predecessors, and on a tour one may hear, "Here's a pocket the old timers left us." Although our miners now use modern technology to find gold buried in the rock, their awareness of the past is never far away. Our Underground Tour is an incomparable experience for anyone interested in the California Gold Rush.

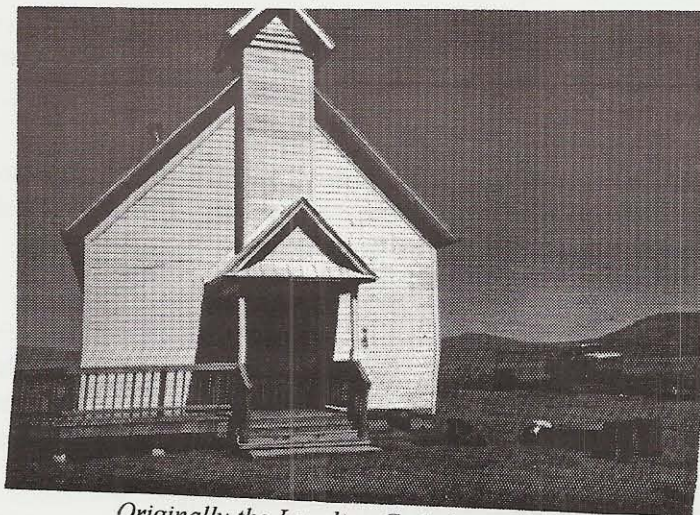
The Museum's most popular tours are the Historic Mine Tour for \$25, covering the mine site, shop and mill buildings, dry room, and videos of underground mining. The Underground Tour for \$95 offers all of the above plus several hours underground. A traditional Cornish pastie lunch is included with all tours. Tours are generally conducted in season Saturdays at 10 a.m. or 12 noon, and are by reservation only. Tours are offered intermittently through the winter months. Museum hours are Saturday and Sunday 12 noon to 5 p.m., Memorial Day through Labor Day weekends.

The Museum is working on a 3-D model of the Sixteen-to-One Mine to assist tour participants in visualizing the structure of the mine they will explore. Many other exhibits are planned.

The Museum is located at 356 Main Street in the old Alleghany Supply Company building. For information and directions, write to P.O. Box 907, Alleghany, CA 95910 or call (916)287-3330.

## LOYALTON MUSEUM

Displays in this small museum include 19th-Century clothing and housewares, wooden skis and a collection of glass from the 1930's. Handmade farm implements from the late 1800's and a "donkey," or logging steam engine, represent the agriculture and timber industries. Washoe baskets, arrowheads and photographs round out the exhibits. Open Wednesday through Friday 9 A.M.—2 P.M.; weekends 11 A.M.—4 P.M. Open later May through October; call for hours. For information call 993-6754.

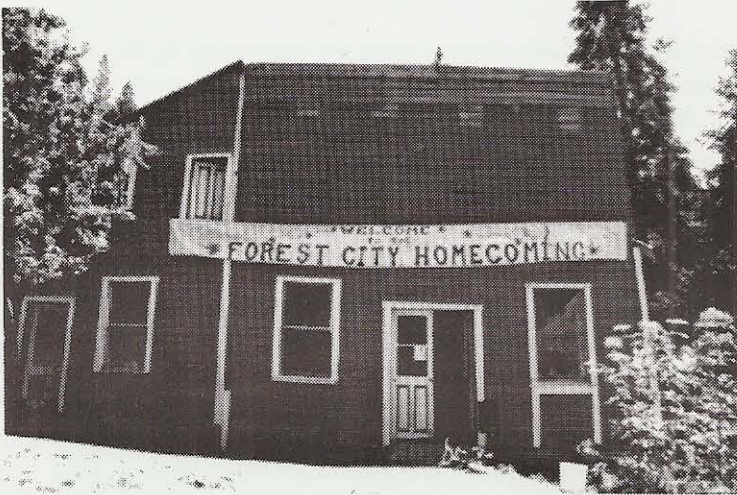


*Originally the Loyaltown Catholic Church, now part of the museum complex.*



# Historical Museums of Sierra County

## FOREST CITY DANCE HALL



The tiny town of Forest City not only has a museum, it *is* a museum. Most of the buildings date from the 1800's, as do the three cemeteries (including the 1890 Chinese Cemetery) and the 1877 Waterworks. The entire townsite was recently nominated for the National Registry of Historic Places.

The Museum, operated by the Forest City Historical Association, is located in the Dance Hall, built in 1883. Artifacts from the barber shop, saloon and billiard hall that occupied the first floor are on display, as well as other items of nineteenth-century mining town life including a forge, a Pelton wheel, and the gold scales utilized by the Forest City Meat Market. The hand-grained wainscoting, bar, fixtures, sink and cabinets are all as they were one hundred years ago.

The museum is open weekends Noon to 4 PM from Memorial Day through Labor Day, and other times by appointment.

An informative walking tour map and brochure has been published by the Forest City Historical Association. For a copy, write: Forest City Historical Association, Forest City via Alleghany, CA 95910. (The map is also available at the Tahoe National Forest North Yuba Ranger Station on Highway 49 at Marysville Road in Camptonville.) For information call 287-3413 or 287-3207.

## KENTUCKY MINE MUSEUM

The Sierra County Historical Park and Museum, located at the Kentucky Mine, is located on Highway 49, just above Sierra City.

The Kentucky Consolidated Gold Mining Company was formed in 1853. A five stamp mill was built in the 1860's and was increased to ten stamps in 1888. After being abandoned for some time, Emil Loeffler of Sierra City reopened the mine in 1920 and operated it with his son, Adolph "Dutch" Loeffler. In 1928 they began the construction of a new 10-stamp mill made mostly of salvaged materials and equipment. The Loefflers ran the mine and mill until 1944, when Dutch was killed in the mine. It was last operated in 1953. It remains today the only tourable and operable stamp mill in its original condition in California.

The Sierra County Historical Park and Museum was officially dedicated in 1977 and is operated by the Sierra County Historical Society. The museum displays include mining equipment, Gold Rush period clothing and household items, photographs, and natural history. The museum is also the current home of the only replica of the Sierra County Gold Collection, the world's largest private collection of natural gold nuggets. (The original is housed at the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History, for security reasons).

The stamp mill tour is a high point of any visit to Sierra County. The tour visits the mine portal, miners' cabin, and then crosses a trestle to the mill building. The process of sorting and milling the gold-laden quartz ore is explained as the tour follows the path of the ore down the levels of the mill.



Photo by Sylvia Baiker. Used by permission.

The Park and Museum are open Memorial Day through September, Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and weekends only in October. Stamp mill tours are given at 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. Picnic facilities are available. The Kentucky Mine Summer Concert Series is held each Friday from July 4th weekend through Labor Day weekend in the outdoor amphitheater.

For more information write P.O. Box 260, Sierra City, CA 96125 or call (916) 862-1310.



# Historical Museums of Sierra County

## DOWNIEVILLE MUSEUM

The Downieville museum building dates back to 1832 and today holds a unique place in Gold Rush history. It was originally built as a store (and purportedly also a gambling hall) by the Chinese who settled in this northern mining community. Its construction of mortarless schist rock saved it from the many catastrophic fires that periodically razed towns throughout the Gold Country.

Following its tenure as a Chinese store, the building was owned and operated as a grocery store for many years by Mr. and Mrs. J.M.B. Meroux. In the early 1930's, the Meroux family graciously donated the building to the community as a museum under the trusteeships of the Native Daughters and Native Sons of the Golden West.

Today, the Downieville Museum contains a number of informative collections that depict life in this area from Gold Rush days to the present. Mining implements, Indian artifacts, household articles, and lodge regalia are all well represented. The museum also houses a one-sixth scale model stamp mill and an ore-grinding arrastra to illustrate local mining techniques. In addition, there is an extensive collection of early photographs and maps that allow the visitor to visualize life "in the old days."

The Downieville museum is open daily from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. from May through October and hosts some 10,000 visitors annually. Volunteer staff members are on site to assist visitors and answer questions about the Museum building and artifacts.

For information, write: Downieville Museum, P.O. Box 484, Downieville CA 95936.

## DOWNIEVILLE FOUNDRY

The Foundry was built in 1855. The large wooden building now houses an incredibly detailed HO-scale model of turn-of-the-century Downieville, "Queen of the Mother Lode." The town and its buildings have been faithfully reproduced from photographs and other original sources. Logging and mining exhibits include slides, videos, photographs and interesting and unusual artifacts. The museum also features a replica of the furnace and operation of the foundry believed to be the oldest in the Mother Lode.

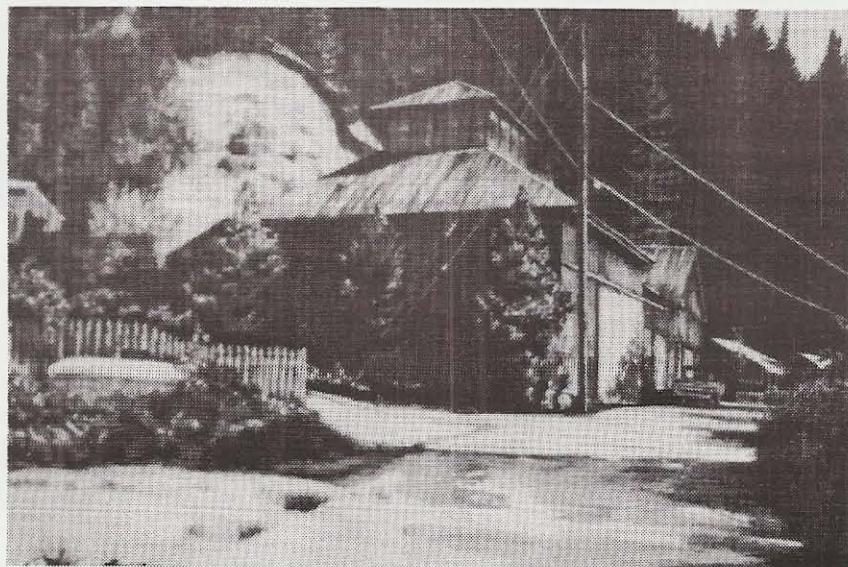
Foundry lecture tours are offered by reservation only, and also include an audio tour of old Downieville, lunch or dinner at a local restaurant and a look into several historic structures. The tours are given by Downieville residents and designed for the true lover of history. Cost is nominal, but the tour is not recommended for children under 15. For information call 289-3261.

### GOLD COUNTRY INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

Many Gold Country museums, events, parks and other points of interest are listed on the World Wide Web at  
<http://www.malakoff.com/goldcountry.htm>.



Damaris Harbert photo. Used by permission.



Drawing by Phil Pollard. Used courtesy of the artist.



## KENTUCKY MINE MUSEUM NEWS

by Karen Donaldson

Yes, this really is the Fall/Winter issue!

The museum had a good year even though there were fewer visitors than in previous years. Many local businesses experienced a similar drop in numbers and our records show that 4,000 people took the stamp mill tour and visited the museum. Of these visitors a greater percentage took the tour than in the past and bought more in the gift shop and this helped balance things out.

Some of the special group tours were given to the docents of Plumas-Eureka State Park in Johnsville and the docents of Bridgeport State Park, numerous Elderhostel groups led by George Ross in association with Feather River College in Quincy, students from Truckee Middle School, prospector and 4WD clubs, and artists with a Forest Service touring project.

As ever, we are deeply grateful to the dedicated volunteers who took a day or many days (!) out of their summer to help out at the museum. To her credit and our good fortune, Fran Burgard was able to continue coordinating schedules. Thank you, Fran!

November 4 was the occasion of a 90th birthday celebration for one of our long time volunteers, Charity Clover. It was held by her family at the High Country Inn and very well attended. Dave Bloch generously donated time and equipment to record portions on video. Recorded in conversation with Charity are Hal Wright, Dave Price, Jean Herrington, Ruth Jones, Jim Austen and Rose Eames. When edited, a copy of these reminiscences will be given to Charity as a memento of the auspicious event.

On December 2, the Historical Society and the Sierra County Arts Council co-hosted a luncheon at the Sierra Valley Lodge in Calpine. This was a general membership meeting and also an opportunity to thank our volunteers. Certificates of Appreciation were given to the following (even though some were unable to attend):

Speranza Avram, Dave Bloch, Lorre Beever, Paul and Mary Bettencourt, Rita Bradley, Frances Brett, Fran Burgard, Bob and Carol Canby, Don and Arline Castleberry, Bev Copren, Pat Crilly, Jo Ann Gahagan, Jack Hawkins, Carmen Hescok, Wanda Longsine, Linc and Billie Madsen, Carol Marshall, Dennis Messa, Ruth Neubert, Mary Nourse, Gary and Lauren Ranz and Maren Scholberg. The food was excellent and a good time was had by all. Susan Haren of the *Sierra Booster* took photos and wrote a very nice article which was published in the December 15th issue.

## SUMMER CONCERT SERIES

In spite of a slow start due to the lingering cool weather, the series was very successful with an average attendance of 150 per

week. We are finding that the concerts are creating a significant draw to Sierra County and not only helping the museum but the local economy in general. Much appreciated are the local businesses who purchased ad space on our season poster and additionally helped publicize the concerts each week. Special thanks to Bassett's Station for lending their popcorn machine!

The wooden benches in the amphitheater are still on their last legs. Our Capital Campaign to raise funds to replace them with permanent aluminum seating (with backs) has raised \$874.50 to date, and the now official estimated cost of replacement is between \$9,000 and \$11,000, depending on how much labor is donated toward installation. One option we have may be to remove the benches until we are nearer our goal and have people bring their own chairs.

## MUSEUM DONATIONS

The following donations have been received:

From James and Lore Rush, a **tortoiseshell manicure set and an intricate hair pin box**, both circa 1900. These were originally owned by Julia Grantham of the Grantham talc and gold mines in Death Valley.

From John G. Rose, **12 mounted photographs, circa 1900 of downtown businesses in Sierra City and several nearby mines**. These belonged to his mother and were originally in the Rose Hotel, now the Sierra Buttes Inn.

From Frances Burton, a **brass drink token** from Armstrong Bros. of Alleghany. This was found during excavation in Nevada City.

From Kenneth Edwards, a **photograph of students in front of the Sierra City School** taken February 14, 1934. Also included is a listing of each student's name and a report card from that year.

## KENTUCKY MINE MUSEUM MEMORIALS

From Mr. E.F. Schotzberger, a donation to the endowment fund.

From Claire Green Lampson and Wm. R. Green, a donation in memory of Ruth Perryman Green.

From Sophie Tschopp, a donation in memory of Mary Haley Coopman.

From Kate Gibson, photographs and remembrances of her sister, Mary S.H. Coopman for the In Memoriam Book.

From the family of R. Bradner Mead, a tribute to him published in the San Francisco Mensa Magazine to include in the In Memoriam Book. Brad was very generous with his time as a volunteer at the museum and with his passing we have lost a friend.

This year also marks the passing of Audrey Pearl Browning who, with her husband George, developed the Lodge at Sardine Lake in the late 1930's which is still a family business. She is greatly missed.

*Please turn to next page*



**KENTUCKY MINE MUSEUM NEWS** *continued*

So far, this winter has been very mild with more rain than snow. Before long, spring will be here with its many activities and a more timely Spring issue of *The Sierran* which is already shaping up. We hope you enjoy this special edition on the different museums in Sierra County. We hope it will generate interest and bring visitors who will appreciate the history of this part of the world.

A special Thank You is extended to Speranza Avram who has served as President for the past three years. She has taken a very active role and vastly improved our level of professionalism as an organization. On behalf of the Sierra County Historical Society, we have benefitted greatly from her leadership and appreciate her time and efforts on our behalf.

### SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP REPORT

There are 200 current memberships which include some reciprocal memberships with other historical societies. There are 20 Life members.

We greatly appreciate the following Supporting and Business members:

Larry Doyle	Fresno
Bruce and Marie Franks	Sierraville
David Marshall & family	Downieville
Paul and Mary Bettencourt	Half Moon Bay
Mrs. Margaret Wiltshire	Kenwood
Bassett's Station	Sierra City
Dickie Exploration	Alleghany
Nina Dons Realty	Loyalton
High Country Inn	Sierra City
Leonard's Market	Loyalton
The Ruffled Goose	Downieville
Saundra Dyer's Resort	Downieville
Sierra Plumas Realty	Sierra City
Dr. Lee D. Walker	Loyalton

#### A REMINDER...

...to those of you who have not yet renewed your memberships. Dues are due and payable for 1996 and may be paid in any of the categories listed on page 2.

Thank You!

Your continued support is very much appreciated.

R.T. King photo from Sierra Valley Memories, University of Nevada, Reno



### Featured Volunteer

#### *Rita Bradley*

Rita Bradley was born in Verdi, Nevada to Delia and Isaac Martinetti on August 20, 1914. In 1916, the family purchased a ranch outside Sattley, California. It was here that Rita and her two sisters Elwina and Dorothy and brother Elver grew up. Everyone worked on the ranch doing haying, milking and feeding cows.

Rita attended school in Sattley through the eighth grade, then went to Sierraville School for two years and finally Reno High School. She graduated from Reno in 1933.

Rita and her sisters took over the Sattley Store and Post Office in February 1941. Rita was the Sattley Postmaster for 35 years before retiring in 1976.

In 1943, Rita married Harry Bradley, a rancher working with the Cavett family. They made their home in Sattley, raising three children; Romilda, Nancy and David.

Over the years, Rita has belonged to many local organizations. She is an active member of the Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Loyalton. Sierra Valley Grange awarded Rita her 60-Year pin five years ago. She has also been active in the Sierraville School PTA, Farm Bureau, Sierra Valley Cattlewomen's Association, and, of course, the Sierra County Historical Society.

Rita volunteers her time at the Kentucky Mine Museum at least once a week during the summer months. If you are curious about Sierra Valley history, she is an excellent source of information, remembering names, dates and stories.

The Historical Society thanks Rita Bradley for her many years of continuous, reliable, energetic support! We are happy to name her as our first *Sierran* Featured Volunteer.