

# THE SIERRAN

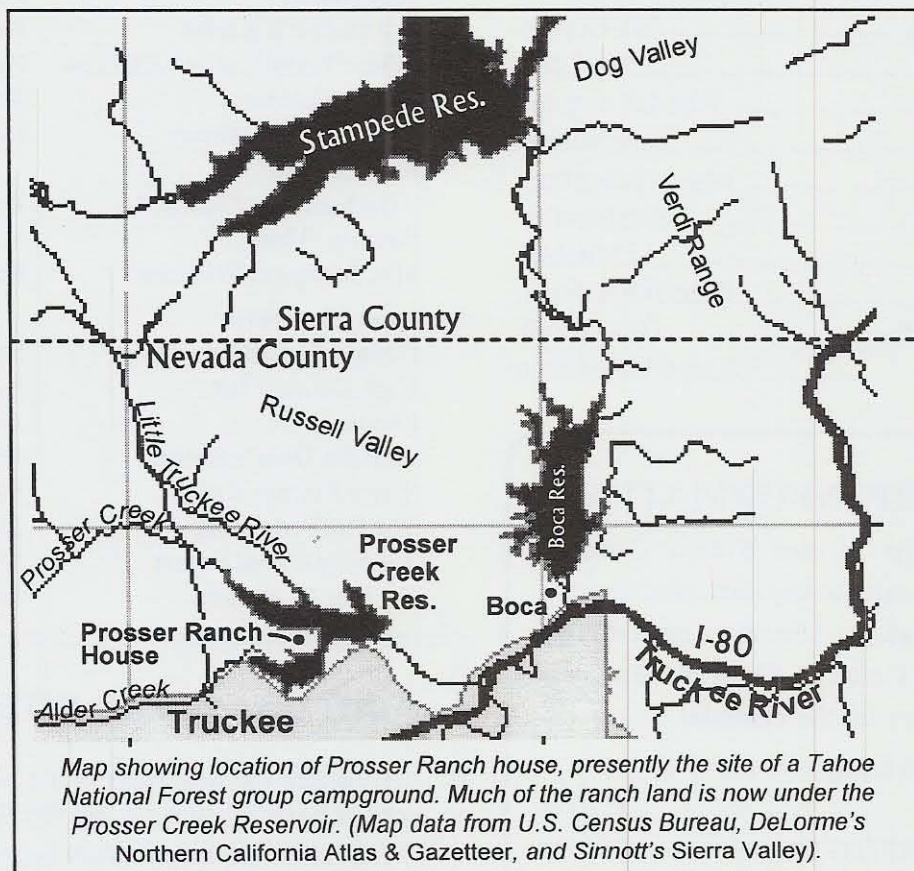
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*a member of the California Conference of Historical Societies*

Volume XXIV, Number 1

Summer 1996

## The Prosser Family Ranch

by Lauren Ranz



Map showing location of Prosser Ranch house, presently the site of a Tahoe National Forest group campground. Much of the ranch land is now under the Prosser Creek Reservoir. (Map data from U.S. Census Bureau, DeLorme's Northern California Atlas & Gazetteer, and Sinnott's Sierra Valley).

My great great grandfather, William Jones Prosser, was born in the town of Monmouth on the border of England and Wales in 1815. He traveled to Ohio in 1844 at the age of 29, settling later that year in Pittsburgh, where he engaged in butchering. On January 1, 1846 he married Nancy Jane Mansfield, a native of Pennsylvania. In 1849 he alone traveled overland to California and purchased 1,200 acres of land on what became known as Prosser Creek in Nevada County, located approximately five miles north of the town of Truckee. On this same trip he negotiated a Mexican Land Grant of 1,600 acres in Placer County near Rocklin (seven miles below Auburn), with the help of John Sutter, returning East over a year later. In 1852, William again traveled west overland by a wagon pulled by mules, but this time he was accompanied by his wife and two children, Mary Jane and John. Family oral history says that the mules

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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 us!

### 1996 OFFICERS, DIRECTORS and STAFF

President.....	Bill Copren
Vice President.....	Bill Long
Treasurer.....	Wanda Longsine
Secretary.....	Lauren Ranz
Membership Chair.....	Maren Scholberg
Directors.....	Rita Bradley
	Al Mitchell
Museum Director.....	Karen Donaldson
Sierran 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

## SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP REPORT

There are 150 current memberships which include some reciprocal memberships with other historical societies. This number is down from the end of last year because there are about 50 members who have not paid dues for 1996. This is a reminder to those people—*We Need You!*

We greatly appreciate the following Supporting and Business members:

### Supporting Members:

Lowell and Eunice Banks	Sierra City
Larry Doyle	Fresno
Bruce and Marie Franks	Sierraville
Sara Hagerty	Carlsbad
Bill and Lois Keeler	Sattley
Jolene Torey/Casey Killebrew	Sierraville
Stephen Linsley	Berkeley
Janet Holm McHenry	Loyalton
Kenneth and	
Barbara Van Gundy, Jr.	Roseville
Beverly White	Walnut Creek
Mrs. Margaret Wilshire	Kenwood

### Business Members:

Donald R. Dickey	San Francisco
High Country Inn	Sierra City
Leonards	Loyalton
Saundra Dyer's Resort	Downieville
Sierra Plumas Realty	Sierra City
The Ruffled Goose	Downieville
Tahoe National Forest	Nevada City
Dr. Lee D. Walker	Loyalton

## FIND US ON THE INTERNET!

Although the Kentucky Mine Museum does not yet have its own site on the World Wide Web, museum information is available on some travel and tourism sites, including these:

<http://www.malakoff.com/muse.htm>

[http://www.insideout.com/travel/  
history/sierra/mining/mining.htm](http://www.insideout.com/travel/history/sierra/mining/mining.htm)

Also, you may write us at our Email address:

[kentuckymine@telis.org](mailto:kentuckymine@telis.org)



## Kentucky Mine Museum News

by Karen Donaldson

We are somewhat behind schedule with this issue of The Sierran. It is still summer however, and so this is the Spring/Summer issue.

We started out 1996 with a tour for 30 students in April. They attend Glorietta School in Orinda and stay at Shangri-La near Downieville each year for one week and get to learn about the area and its history. The first weekend in May we had a work party to get the grounds cleaned up after the winter. Lots of raking! The stamp mill got swept out and signs got painted, including the original sign from The Bigelow House. It dates back to circa 1870 and hangs outside the museum building. It is in very good condition and now looks really great. We very much appreciate the volunteers who helped out which included a group from the Lions Club.

On May 12th we had our annual fundraiser, the Spring Fever Dance and Cajun Barbecue featuring the music of Mumbo Gumbo. The band very generously donated back a significant portion of their usual fee and helped make this our most successful fundraising event to date. Nita Nesbitt and her Corner Cafe in Sierraville prepared the food which was good and spicy. Many other volunteers assisted. It was a lot of work and everyone pulled together to make it a really fun way to support the museum.

Several special tours were given in May, one to a group from Plumas-Eureka State Park in Johnsville and one to an Elderhostel group from Feather River College in Quincy led by George Ross. The latter group stayed at the Sierra Valley Lodge in Calpine. A wedding was held in the amphitheatre on May 19th. And then there was the official opening day of May 25th!

On June 3rd, the carpets were professionally cleaned throughout. Although difficult at the time, in retrospect, this was a rewarding experience. Several classes from Truckee Middle School visited for tours the first week in June. They spent the week camping at Wild Plum and had really brave teachers. The Downieville High School held their commencement exercises in the amphitheatre on June 14th.

Three students graduated this year. It was a very nice ceremony and well attended. The parents of the graduates kindly helped patch the seats together and clean up for the event. On June 30th, a tour led by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management visited the park and museum.

In July, San Francisco State University's Sierra Nevada Field Campus (located a few miles up the highway from Sierra City) had an after-hours group visit specifically to study and count the bats that live in the stamp mill. It turns out we have a rare and endangered species by the name of Plecodus or Townsend's Big Eared Bat that have adopted the mill. They have actually been here for many years but we are only recently learning about them thanks to the biologists who visit. Several years ago we had a group from the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco here to study them. It seems that abandoned mine buildings are their habitat of choice and with the demolition of same they are not adapting well and are dying out.

We have a thriving maternal colony who have their babies in the mill in late spring. They consume moths and have the ability to hover like hummingbirds. This feature enables them to glean moths off the leaves of trees and also to retrieve baby bats that don't have the hang of it at the beginning. They are normally quite shy and don't tolerate the slightest disturbance but have somehow managed to adapt to the tours in the stamp mill. They have become an added attraction. We appreciate the bat patrols as we have a lot of moths due to the oak trees in the area.

Sierra County is still in the process of administering the grant awarded from the State Parks and Recreation Department approximately eight years ago. The \$20,000 grant was awarded to (1) retimber the mine portal for viewing, (2) repair the trestle, (3) repair the water system to the Pelton wheel in the mill, and (4) install auxiliary pathway lighting. Michael Miller of the Original 16-to-1 Mine in Alleghany had offered to complete all these projects with his crews for the amount of the grant; Sierra County has instead broken each aspect down into separate jobs and appears to be putting each project out to bid, first for specifications and then later for

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met with disaster some distance into the trip and were replaced by the faithful milk cows, traveling via Salt Lake, Bents Fort, the Humboldt Sink, and the then-infamous Donner Pass to California. The family successfully arrived in Nevada City on September 26, 1852.

An interesting side note is that my great-grandmother Leslie Teresa Schnable (who married great-grandfather David Mansfield Prosser) was the niece of Amelia Schnable who married Albert Trummel. They had seven children (Leslie's first cousins), one of which was named Amalia who married Henry L. Donner, a descendant of the Donner Family survivors.

The late fall and winter months were spent in the "Dove Grove House" at the Rocklin area ranch, tending the cows and sheep and, as the story goes, breeding the first Tri-Color Collies in California. In the spring they drove their cows and sheep on an arduous journey up and over the Sierra to the Prosser Ranch north of Truckee, roughly following the routes of Highways 49, 20 and I-80. Ice-cutting for profit was included in the family's high country endeavors.

The passing of little Mary Jane in 1853 was offset somewhat by the birth of Katherine, but in the next eighteen years only four of the eleven children born to William and Nancy would survive to adulthood and only two would survive their parents. David Mansfield born in 1856 and George William born in 1859 were to be these two.

In time the Mexican Land Grant was declared null and void on the Rocklin Ranch by the "Big Four" in their quest to acquire land for the transcontinental railroad scheme. Great-grandmother Nancy Jane passed on in 1876 at the age of forty when David was twenty. David was my mother's grandfather. She remembers him and his gentle ways; she also remembers him telling of a rugged and extremely demanding life on the ranches. When great-great-grandfather William gave the two boys a choice of running the high country ranch or going

out on their own, they both chose the latter. David eventually became a Teamster and employee of the San Francisco Market Street Railway Company. William continued to work and live at the Prosser high country ranch and also remarried (Celina Greenwood, the widow of a famous mountain man) until his passing in 1884 at the age of sixty-nine. It was at this time that the ranch passed out of the family's possession.

My grandfather, Frederick William Prosser, was born four years after his grandfather William's death but when he grew up, he too became a man attached to the land as an apple rancher in Sebastopol, California, where my mother Audrey and her two sisters were raised, and where David was a frequent visitor. This property is still in the family.

My aunt remembers going to the Prosser family cemetery as a child with her grandmother, David's wife. It was located near the Dove Grove House which was at that time only a foundation and fireplace. William, Nancy, and all but one of the eleven children are buried there and the missing one may be in the plot, where there is a missing flat headstone (see photo).



*Tall obelisks mark the family graves; note the flat headstones nearby. (Ranz family photo)*

The Prosser Ranch home site is located at the Prosser Ranch group campground, part of the Tahoe National Forest. It is a spectacular spot overlooking the Sierra to the west and now the Prosser Creek Reservoir to the east. For me, because I now live in and love this same area, there are voices from the past that only vaguely resemble my own, yet as someone else has said, "What these voices say about the enduring dimensions of life, work, hardship, self-reliance, love, delight and loss—about living in the present." I want my children to know.



## **PROSSER CREEK— Known by Other Names**

Included in the first party to discover and travel the Truckee River Route through the Sierra in 1844 was Caleb Greenwood (a well-known mountain man and friend of Jim Beckwourth) and his two sons, John and Brit. One member of the party wrote they had to cross the Truckee River ten times in one mile and were often compelled to travel in the bed of the river as there was no room on the banks for the oxen to find a foothold. Due to his experiences on this expedition, John Greenwood resolved to relocate the route so as to avoid the upper canyon of the Truckee.

On May 17, 1845, a group of men started from Sutter's Fort headed eastward. Leading this expedition was John Greenwood. William H. Winter, also a member of this expedition, described their passage through the Sierra Nevada and referred to the "North branch of the Truckies River" (Prosser Creek) and "Snow River" (Little Truckee River). (See map, page 1.) These were the first recorded names for these rivers and this expedition was the first on record to cross Stampede Valley. The new-found route was much easier and avoided the upper canyon of the Truckee River, thus fulfilling Greenwood's vow.

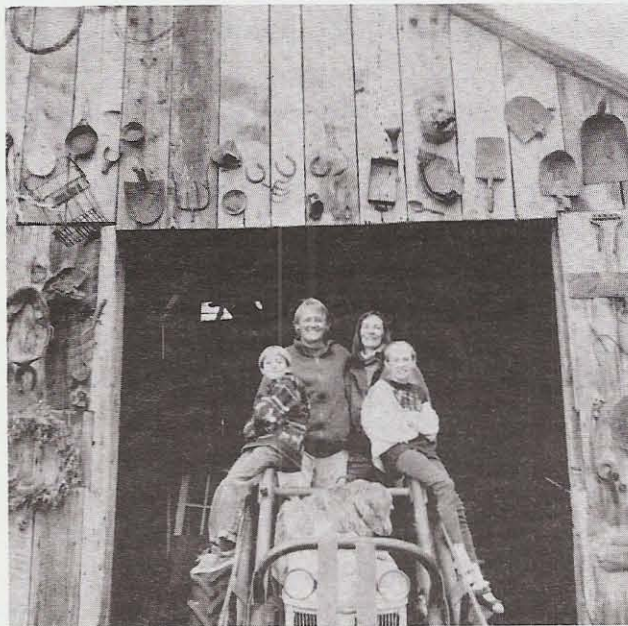
By the fall of 1845, the "North branch of the Truckies River" was being called "John's Creek" in Greenwood's honor. "Snow River" became "Wind River."

T.H. Jeffersen's 1846 map of this area used another set of names; "Pine Creek" (Prosser Creek), "Lawn Valley" (Dog Valley), "Raven C" (Little Truckee River); "Summit Creek" (Cold Creek); "Steep Stoney Hills" (Verdi Range). These names, however, were never popular and have since been forgotten.

Diaries written by pioneers in 1846 and 1847 telling of their migration across the Sierra referred to "John's Creek," "John Greenwood's Creek" and "Greenwood's Creek," which is the present day Prosser Creek. The Donner Party used Greenwood's easier route on their tragic adventure in 1846.

*Adapted from an article by Prof. W. Turrentine Jackson in Vol. 3, No. 2 of the Sierra County Historical Society Bulletin.*

## **Featured Volunteers: The Ranz Family**



Gary and Lauren Ranz have lived in Sierraville on the eastern side of Sierra County for fourteen years, since buying their 120-year-old farm house. Their children, Audreanne and Ezra, are fifth-generation Californians.

Gary works in the fields of economics and education and enjoys sports. He is active in the Sierra County Child Abuse Council, Economic Council and Historical Society and the Seven Winds Council. He also serves as a County representative on the four-county Sierra Economic Development District Board of Directors.

Lauren also has an interest in education, and works in the fields of graphic design and real estate renovation. She enjoys sports and gardening and is active in the Sierraville Elementary School PTA, the Seven Winds Council, the Christian Science Society, and the Sierra County Historical Society.

Audreanne will be attending the seventh grade at Loyaltan Intermediate School this fall. She likes sports, horses and reading.

Ezra is currently being home schooled. He enjoys sports, reading, and building with Lego blocks.

Many thanks to the whole Ranz family for their ongoing support of the Kentucky Mine Museum!



**KENTUCKY MINE MUSEUM NEWS***continued from Page 3*

contractors. So far, \$2,100 has been spent to get specifications to repair just the trestle. No work has yet begun.

Due to the delay to these projects and the dry-rot in the support timbers of the trestle we are unable to use it on the tours. Instead we are rerouting from the mine portal back down the hill, climbing the stairs to the hopper room and following the process of the milling from there. We are benefitting from the extra exercise and have taken the humorous approach, referring to the Stairmaster bonus, but there are some obvious drawbacks involved. The white-headed woodpecker family that moved into the worst of the timbers was an added attraction for about three weeks. They have since moved on to larger quarters, leaving only some perfectly round holes and a shakier situation. We will be relieved to see some progress in this area.

**MUSEUM DONATIONS**

Last year a significant donation was made to the park by Tom Hennessy of Sierra City which somehow neglected to get a mention in the last issue. Our apologies! We have been graced with an 18-foot **hand-turned wooden flagpole** made from Douglas fir. It was installed on July 4, 1995 and does the job beautifully. Tom and his partner are reviving an old art and their efforts are proudly displayed in some very prominent places, including the front lawns of former U.S. Presidents.

Dave Bloch and Speranza Avram have donated a **fax machine** to the museum. (We have sent out some faxes but not yet received any.) Sierra County has lent us a surplus **computer** and **electric typewriter**. The computer started out as a 386 and was upgraded to a 486 by local computer and technological wizard, Dave Bloch. We are making great strides, however our "Web" site is still in the stamp mill windows designed by the resident spiders. C.K. Smith and Mike Heuer arranged for our **highway banner** which announces the Concert Series to be repaired at a shop in Grass Valley. Mike and an assistant then arranged it over Highway 49 in the center of town. It gets very good visibility there and

we appreciate their extra efforts. Carroll Hayes has donated two **steel-clad doors** to replace the old ones at the bathrooms. They get a lot of exposure at that end of the building and after twenty years the old ones are worn out. Malcolm Cooper donated some **paint** for them and as soon as they are painted they will be installed.

Copies of some very interesting old **photographs** have been donated by Barney Lusk of North San Juan. Mr. Lusk's grandparents were Mary Hagerty Bassett and Jacob Bassett who established Bassett House in 1871. Jacob Bassett was also the Water Master for the Sierra Buttes Mining Company and controlled the flow of water from Upper Sardine Lake through the wooden flumes that operated the company's stamp mills in Sierra City. Mr. Lusk's parents were also prominent in the area, operating a summer resort at Lusk Meadows which was formerly known as Salmon Meadows. As a result of Mr. Lusk's visit to the museum, we were able to put him in touch with another family, also descended from the Bassetts and looking for relatives in the area. We hope to be able to conduct an oral history interview with Mr. Lusk in the near future and learn more about his family heritage.

**KENTUCKY MINE MUSEUM MEMORIALS**

The family of Brad Mead has made a generous donation to the museum. With part of it we are purchasing a five-foot English garden bench made of teak which will be engraved to read:

IN MEMORY OF R. BRADNER MEAD  
1918—1995 FROM HIS LOVING FAMILY.

Brad was a summer resident of Sierra City and also a dedicated volunteer at the Kentucky Mine Museum. The remainder of the donation will be added to the Memorial Fund which acts as a trust. We are expecting the bench at the end of August.

Another part time resident of Sierra County passed away recently. The co-workers of Alan MacDonald at Zeneca Ag Products in Richmond, California and the co-workers of his partner Greg Skraznas at Bank of America in Pleasant Hill, California have joined together to make a donation to the Memorial Fund in Alan's memory. We will be installing a bronze



plaque and including a tribute in the In Memoriam Book in the near future.

### THE KENTUCKY MINE SUMMER CONCERTS

The 1996 Concert Series marks the Tenth Anniversary of concerts being held in the amphitheatre. The Concert Series provides the greatest contribution to our operating budget. So far this year's attendance has been the best ever! Dennis Messa deserves a special "Thank You" here for being the one volunteer who has consistently attended every performance and helped make them the success they are today. We are deeply grateful for his dedication. We hope to be able to continue this fine tradition in the years to come.

The 1996 schedule reflects our ongoing commitment to showcase a variety of traditional and contemporary, American and international entertainment:

- July 5 PAST DUE AND PLAYABLE**—Great bluegrass, with essences of swing, country, Western, and folk rock.
- July 12 NINE DAYS OLD**—Upbeat acoustic trio playing original songs with folk, bluegrass and Celtic influences.
- July 19 MEN OF WORTH**—Traditional music and wry humor by Scot Donnie MacDonald and Irishman Jimmy Keigher.
- July 26 SOURDOUGH SLIM and THE SADDLE PALS**—Old-time cowboy music, yodeling, stories, wacky cowboy banter (and great outfits!).
- Aug. 2 McAVOY LAYNE as MARK TWAIN & GORDY THE BANJO-OLOGIST**—Twain's wit and humor teamed with music played on rare antique banjos.
- Aug. 9 LOUIS VALENTINE JOHNSON**—A virtuoso performance of Spanish and Baroque classical guitar music.
- Aug. 16 CATS AND JAMMERS**—Swinging trio of sax, bass, guitar, violin and vocal harmony.
- Aug. 23 JIM KING with KAY HANSEN**—Original cowboy poetry and traditional Old West songs.
- Aug. 30 BOBBIE WEBB and THE SMOOTH BLUES BAND**—Refined blues and R&B, featuring Webb's signature *simultaneous* playing of two saxophones.

We continue to need ongoing, reliable volunteer help to staff the Concert Series and the Museum. If you have time to participate in a rewarding volunteer work experience, please call the Museum at 862-1310.

## SOME NOTES ON THE SIERRA VALLEY

Reprinted from James J. Sinnott's *Sierra Valley: Jewel of the Sierras*.

### ECONOMIC STATISTICS OF SIERRA VALLEY FOR 1863:

Acres of hay land claimed:	16,040
Tons of hay produced:	10,380
Feet of lumber produced:	9,000,000
Shakes and shingles:	2,155,000
Pounds of cheese made:	7,200
Pounds of butter made:	38,255

### Estimates for 1864:

Feet of lumber:	20,000,000
Shakes and shingles:	8,000,000

(page 9).

### ASSORTED QUOTATIONS:

**Game in Sierra Valley** (*Sierra Citizen*, May 13, 1854): It is said that numbers of deer, antelope, and hare, may be found in Sierra Valley. This seems to be a favorite haunt for all kinds of game, a fact that has been well understood by the Indians, judging from the number of old rancherias and other Indian "signs" to be found in the Valley. After the snow melts from the trail, we promise ourselves a few days in this hunters' paradise, provided we are unaccompanied by a city sportsman with his spectacles and "hail gun." (page 53).

**Grizzly Bear** (*Sierra Citizen*, May 20, 1854): A small grizzly bear was killed in Sierra Valley last Sunday. They are said to be very numerous in that neighborhood... It is rumored that a hunting party is forming in town (Downieville), who will go to the valley in a body and give notice to the grizzlies to either leave the diggings or come out of the tall grass. Chickadees and sparrows are to be exempt from the leaden hail, with the exception of lineal descendants of the sparrow that killed Cock Robin. (page 53).

**Report of a Visit to the Valley** (*Mountain Messenger*, July 17, 1865): Times are hard in the Sierra Valley at this time as they are also in the mining camps of the County. The cause of this stagnation where only a year ago all was life and hope, is painfully apparent, and consists in (sic) the fact that the mines, both in Nevada as well as here, and on which all other property depends, are gradually yielding to the pleasure of the times instead of increasing their way to the pick. The main anchor of the farmers' hope in the valley, the height (sic) of their ambition, has been to secure a large tonnage of hay... (page 66)



**Brief news items taken from *The Sierra Valley News* of August 23, 1913, published in Loyalton, California**

(Reprinted from Vol. 1, No. 4 of *Sierra County Historical Society Quarterly*.)

There will be three reels of moving pictures on Friday evening: "The Sheriff's Baby," "From Orton Junction to Fallonville," "The Cat and the Bonnet," and "The Fired Cook." Piano selections will be by Mrs. Peck.

Public schools opened in Loyalton last Monday with 88 pupils in attendance. This number should increase to over 100 in a short time. A.S. Hamlin, Miss Yeve Turner and Miss Nell Field have been re-employed as teachers.

The Loyalton orchestra is practicing diligently in preparation for the Grand Ball in Loyalton September 9th.

Three ball teams have already pledged themselves to enter the tournament at Loyalton during the carnival. All players must be mountain boys; any importation of players from Nevada or the lower country will absolutely not be permitted.

Geo. Hampson, R.I. Hampson and Jack Mardon killed a bear about a mile below Webber Lake last week. The boys say that Bruin had a wonderful appetite for lead and took no less than seven bullets into his system before he gave up the ghost.

The Board of Trustees of the town of Loyalton met in regular session. The city attorney was directed to draft an ordinance making the speed limit of automobiles and motor cycles on the streets of Loyalton at 10 miles per hour.

There will be a lecture on "Child Psychology and Training" at Loyalton Baptist church this week by D. Carl Williams. He is college graduate who has specialized in child psychology and pedagogical methods.

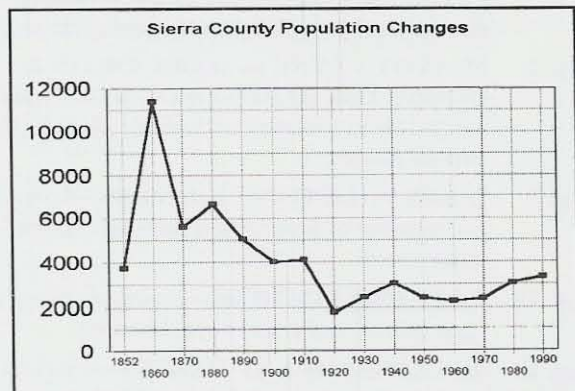
I will pay Two Hundred Dollars to the party or parties who will furnish evidence and conviction of party or parties who doped my horse "Farewell" on Sept. 9, 1912. Signed—Joe Dyson.

## The Biggest Little City...?

One of the most appealing phases in Loyalton's history was the distinction earned when members of the governing body enacted an ordinance which forbade the sale of liquor within the "city limits." The city limits were then made some forty miles square as the city fathers continued to widen the city limits to discourage lumberjacks from walking beyond the city limits for a drink of liquor. As a result Loyalton became the second largest city in California. When the city was incorporated, it had reached an area approximately nine miles to the west, south and east and three miles to the north, making a final total of some fifty-two square miles. The city limits prevailed until the 1930's when the residents voted the restrictive ordinance out; however, until Los Angeles became so large, Loyalton was regarded as the "largest city west of the Mississippi River."

## Just How Small is Sierra County?

The graph below shows the gyrations of the Sierra County population, from the Gold Rush high of 11,387 in the 1860 census, through the post-war 1920 low of only 1,783 (the County lost over half its population during that decade).



Things have been relatively stable since 1980, with the population rising only eight percent since then to our present complement of just over 3,300 residents. Out of 58 California counties, that makes Sierra the second smallest by population, with about 0.015% of the State's people (only Alpine County is smaller). That compares to our size of 959 square miles, about 0.6% of California's area, a rank of 44<sup>th</sup> from the top.