

# THE SIERRA

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

Volume XXV, Number 2

Fall/Winter 1997



*The Home of The Mountain Messenger, circa 1930*

## M.T. Ayres, Editor of The Mountain Messenger

by Jean Ayres Hartley

Soon after the Great Depression of 1929 hit this country our family landed in Downieville, where we lived for the next six years. My father, Milton T. Ayres, was a newspaper man, working on the Oakland Tribune, and dreaming of being any place but there. His imagination and aspiration needed more room. He heard the weekly Mountain Messenger of Downieville, the third oldest newspaper in California, was for sale. The spirit of adventure superseded practicality and he convinced my skeptical mother that they should take their four children and move to the little town of Downieville. Perhaps the lure was the clean mountain air, or, knowing my father, just being near the origin of gold was an irresistible attraction.

Dad didn't have the money to buy the paper, so he went to the merchants in town and convinced them to advance the funds. He promised to provide them with a decent paper. And that is what he did. He published a paper that reflected his experience and good humor. Being a perfectionist, he insisted on high quality production in spite of the antiquated equipment he found there. The Messenger was located in an old three-story house that fronted on the river by the Durgin Bridge. The floor creaked when walked on. I was always afraid my feet would fall through the boards. Type had to be set by hand from cases located on the third floor. Each individual letter had to be selected from the type case and assembled in a metal tray, or "stick".

[Please turn to page 4]



## 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!

### 1997 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.....	Bruce Madsen
	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  
PO Box 141  
Sierraville, CA 96126

## SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Office Address: Kentucky Mine Museum  
PO Box 260, Sierra City, CA 96125  
(530) 862-1310

## SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP REPORT

### New Individual and Family members for 1997:

Loren & Anne Cantrell	San Jose, CA
Evan & Joanne Dailey	San Francisco, CA
Lynn & Janet Cornfield	Verdi, NV
Betty Joy Gouvas	Goshen, UT
William & Mary Green	Roseville, CA
Max Hensley	Burlingame, CA
John P Kennelly	Truckee, CA
David & Claire Lampson	Geyserville, CA
Maureen Meikle	Tiburon, CA
Marilyn Ornbaun	Williams, CA
June Varnum	Loyalton, CA
John & Donna Walton	Concord, CA
Don & Dorothy Winstead	Sierra City, CA
Ray Schneider Family	Corte Madera, CA
Richard Van Doren Family	Palo Alto, CA

## MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

The December Membership Meeting of the Sierra County Historical Society is scheduled for  
Sunday, December 14, 1997  
Downieville Community Hall

### NOON — Catered Luncheon

A modest donation will be appreciated from the general membership. Museum volunteers are welcome as our guests.

### 1:00 pm — Membership Meeting

- Volunteer appreciation
- Recent accomplishments and future plans
- Board of Directors election

As per the by-laws; any member is eligible to nominate themselves or another member for election to the board. Nominations must be submitted in writing to the nominating committee by December 13. Nominations will not be accepted from the floor. At this time there are four board positions open for election.

### 2:00 pm — Guided Tour of the Foundry Museum on Pearl Street in Downieville by Len Kinzler

Due to a scheduling conflict we will not be meeting with the Sierra County Arts Council this year.

Please call the museum (530-862-1310) to confirm your attendance as soon as possible or for more information. We hope to see you there!







## Editor of The Mountain Messenger

[Continued from page 1]

That's why Milton immediately bought a Linotype machine, which simplified his task of setting up the paper. When the machine arrived he invited the townsfolk to watch the magic monster perform its duties. With mysterious click-clicks the tinkle of brass matrices fell into their proper channels in the overhead magazine, producing a hot slug of type from molten metal in an electric pot and placing it in a galley beside the keyboard operator. It was the latest technology in typesetting for that era, though the type for display ads still had to be set by hand.

Money came in very slowly and our lifestyle was meager, but my father was happy to be out of his humdrum job in the big city, and pleased that he could turn out a modern, informative newspaper. On press day people would gather at the post office to await its delivery.

As for the rest of us, we enjoyed living in the beautiful mountains at the confluence of two rivers. How fondly I remember the fragrance and the sound of the river, the joy of the old swimming hole, the beauty of daffodils and lilacs and apple trees on Piety Hill, and the thrill of sledding down hill in front of the school house.

Press day was Friday. The whole family pitched in to get the paper out, — in journalistic terms, "put the baby to bed". We were teenagers at the time. My brothers became efficient "printer's devils". They lifted the big

metal chases of type onto the huge Campbell press, which was much taller than I. It was my job, standing on some boxes, to feed the newsprint into the press as the drums rolled around. I felt very important. Others folded and addressed the papers as they came off the

press, bundled them according to postal zones, and hauled them to the post office in large brown canvas bags.

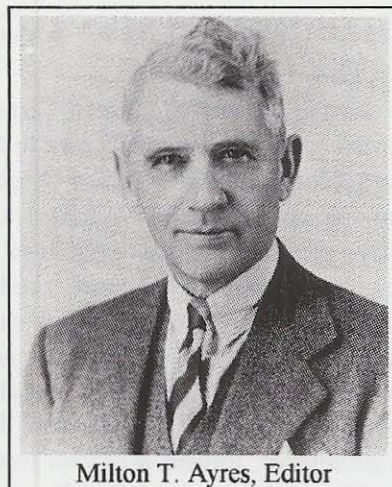
My mother was proofreader, bookkeeper and Society Editor, writing up the activities of the ladies. Sometimes we worked late and Friday dinners were usually lacking any gourmet elements. After dinner Milton would read his paper, and when that perfectionist found a typographical error he would explode. "How the devil did that happen?" we would hear.

Accidental juxtaposition of words really bothered him, such as: "Buy a chair bottom at Taylor's Drygoods and put it on yourself." "George and Amy Reed went to Nevada City (a distance of 47 miles) last Tuesday to spend three days on the Downieville stage."

When a prominent citizen died Dad thought the obituary deserved the front page. The notice of the new movie in town was placed directly below it. Unfortunately, the movie title, "Merrily We Go to Hell", had escaped the editor at make-up time.

My brothers, Bill and David, and I attended Downieville High School, while my sister, Maurine, was away at college. Our neighbor, Belle Alexander, was the Superintendent. I graduated in a class of three, David and I being two of them. Frank Poggi was the third. The graduation ceremony was in Loyalton, since Downieville was only a joint of the union school district. That day the road was being repaired beyond Sierra City, so we were driven that far in one car, then transferred to another that had come from Loyalton. We had to walk around the steam shovel, along the dirt bank, I in long dress and heels, to get to the other car.

Milton was appointed County Supervisor by Governor James Rolph. The income from that position helped a little to broaden what he made on the Messenger. It was sorely needed, as by that time all four



Milton T. Ayres, Editor



Merribel Ayres, Proofreader, etc.



of us were in college. Bill and I went to the University of California in Berkeley, (I later transferred to Stanford). David and Maurine attended Chico State.

It was only possible because we all worked during vacations and part time during school, earning our room and board. I remember working for a while in the office of Frank Turner, County Treasurer, for 35 cents an hour. We got student loans (which were all entirely paid back, though it took years). We shall always be grateful to Ross Taylor, Sr. owner of the drygoods store, who, seeing how hard my father worked for so little pay, was kind enough to loan us our tuition for a few years. He passed on before we could reimburse him.

One day Milton was driving home from Sierra City, after doing some county business. Being tired, and facing the sun, he fell asleep and his car went over the bank and fell about 100 feet, coming to rest on a pile of rocks at the bottom of the canyon. Eventually some people came along and saw the tracks leading over the bank and were able to get help. He was seriously injured and taken to the hospital in Nevada City. His pelvis was broken, also his ribs and one arm. But, his sense of humor still in place, he said he was too mean to die. His belief in God and the power of prayer pulled him through to a complete recovery. Soon after that my parents moved to the Bay Area, and later to Sacramento. They passed on in the 1960's.



Author Jean Ayres Hartley lives with her husband Bill, on five acres of olive trees in Sacramento. They have two children and four grandchildren.

## CALIFORNIA'S OLDEST WEEKLY?

by Bruce Madsen

*The Mountain Messenger's* masthead claims, "California's Oldest Weekly Newspaper." In Sierra County this is accepted as true. But there is another paper with a masthead that claims, "Since 1854, California's Oldest Weekly of Continuous Publication." That paper is the *Mariposa Gazette* and *Miner*. Which claim is true?

Allan Shields is not a private investigator, but he has investigated these claims as if he were one. Shields dove into dusty records, eventually solving the case despite inconsistencies in historic sources.

First, the start dates. The *Mariposa Gazette* and *Miner* was established on January 20, 1854. *The Mountain Messenger* was established on November 19, 1853, apparently the oldest. But let's look further.

*The Mountain Messenger* was started as the *Gibsonville Herald*, then the *Gibsonville Trumpet*. The current name wasn't used until 1854 — starting on either May 10

(according to a history book source) or June 21 (counting back from an 1862 masthead volume and number reference). Likewise, *The Mariposa Gazette*, started life as the *Mariposa Chronicle*. Its name changed with new owners on March 12, 1855. *The Mountain Messenger* is still the first born.

But what about "weekly" and "continuous"? *The Mountain Messenger* started as a semi-monthly in Gibsonville. It wasn't a weekly until it selected its current name and moved to La Porte. (The paper wasn't produced in Downieville until 1864). It has been published continuously since the 1854 date. The *Mariposa Gazette* was a weekly from the start. However, it ceased publication in March 1855 and didn't restart until July 12, 1855, under new ownership. This lapse of several months by the *Gazette* leaves *The Mountain Messenger* with clear title to, "California's Oldest Continuously-Published Weekly Newspaper."

[Data from Allen Shields' copyrighted story in *The Mountain Messenger*, November 25, 1993.]

## SIERRA COUNTY NEWSPAPERS

by Bruce Madsen

The Center for Bibliographical Studies and Research at the University of California, Riverside, is documenting California's newspaper history. Preliminary findings on Sierra County have been summarized by the center.

Downieville was the hotbed of journalism in Sierra County in the early days. Here are the names and dates of those early publications: *Bugle* (1852), *Downieville Herald* (1852-53), *Mountain Echo* (1852-54) which was absorbed by *Sierra Citizen* (1854-1862), *The Mountain Messenger* (1854-present) which moved from La Porte in 1864, *Old Oaken Bucket* (1855), *Sierra Democrat* (1856-1864), *Schoolboy's Echo* (1858), *The Sierra County News* (1862), *Semi-weekly Standard* (1864), *The Sierra Advocate* (1866-1867), *Downieville Democrat* (1870-1871) which became *The Sierra Age* (1871) which was merged into *The Mountain Messenger*, *Downieville Expositor* (1882) and the *Sierra County Enterprise* (1896-1898).

When the *Downieville Herald* moved to Gibsonville, it became the *Gibsonville Herald* (1853) which became the *Gibsonville Trumpet* (1854) which became *The Mountain Messenger* (1854-present).

Forest City was the birth place of the *Sierra Free Press* (1880) and the *Sierra County Tribune* (1881-1882). The *Tribune* moved to Downieville, then to Sierra City, becoming the *Sierra Tribune* (1883-1890).

Sierraville was home to the *Sierra Valley Leader* (1882-1894) and the *Mountain Mirror* (1890) while the *Sierra Valley Record* (1897-1900) was published from "Sierra Valley."

Loyalton is another center of journalism, hosting *The Loyaltonian* (1901-1906?), *Sierra Valley News* (1912-1944), *Loyalton Times* (1940-1943) and the *Sierra Booster* (1949-present).



## MUSEUM DIRECTOR'S REPORT

*[Continued from page 3]*

and for his expert repair of the wiring at the amphitheater so that the show could go on!

By now maybe you're getting the idea that it was quite a summer. I should go back to the beginning...It started with the arrival of Michael Miller and his band of merry miners from the Original 16 to 1 Mine on the 30th of May. I think there were 22 of them. The logs for the trestle and mine projects arrived the next day on the bed of a huge logging truck. These were not logs in the usual sense but 40 ft. Douglas Fir trees. In the process, the logging truck drove over the water main and it inadvertently broke. It was very warm that day and there were those 22 miners, and their cook, and no water on the property. Fortunately for everyone, Charles K. Smith of Sierra City Water Works was able to come to our rescue and by the end of the day we were back to normal in that regard. After that first eventful weekend, the crew was reduced to four or so and they worked diligently for the next eight weeks, even camping in a motorhome at the amphitheater. It was during this time of construction that the family of aggressive yellowjackets moved into the stamp mill and out of concern for our endangered *Plecodus* bats we could not exterminate in any usual manner. This delicate situation called for a chemical-free removal of the nest and this is where Bill and his daughter Kirstin, who is an entomologist, came in. Due to these circumstances beyond our control there were times when we were unable to maintain our schedule of tours. We apologize to those we may have disappointed. We encourage you to visit again in 1998 where the fruits of these labors will be evident. The finished trestle is truly a work of art as well as a sturdy route from mine to mill. All that remains, at this point, is to apply a wood preservative to the structure with a plan to maintain it on an annual basis. A debt of gratitude is owed to the 16 to 1 for their dedication and pride of workmanship.

The portal timbering project is equally spectacular. A long term goal is being realized as approximately 75 feet of the necessary 100 feet are now shored up with peeled poles and hand split lagging. This technique is not used in current mining operations, primarily for economic reasons, and it is especially appropriate here to maintain period authenticity. Mr. Miller has agreed to complete the timbering through to hardrock which should effectively open the Kentucky Mine after some 30 odd years of collapse. This work will be continued during the off season until completed. We will then need to install lights and a sprinkler system to meet safety codes for public access. Our ultimate goal is to recreate the state of the Kentucky Mine during the era of the Loeffler family or to circa 1900. We are really making progress!

As a result of all of this activity we were the focus of two newspaper articles which attracted interest and visitors. The first article was published in the Reno Gazette-Journal on Aug. 24 in the Calendar section. It featured a full page spread with color photographs on page 15. The second article was

published in the Sacramento Bee on Sept. 22 on the front page of the Superior California section. It was written by local correspondent Jane Braxton Little and was very well done. We are planning to have more publicity in the spring of 1998 to start the new year with enthusiasm!

Meanwhile, the Special Use Permit with the US Forest Service expired after 20 years. Sierra County has submitted a renewal application which should be approved for an additional 10 years. USFS representatives Heather Newell and Donna Bertolina visited the park and museum recently to record the improvements and make recommendations. A very favorable impression was made.

Separately, we have been invited to participate in a California State Parks Passport Program to be initiated next year for the California Sesquicentennial. We were recommended by Dick Markley of the Tahoe National Forest. We will have more information on this in the next publication.

## Kentucky Mine Museum Donations

The following donations were received over the summer: from Joe Goss of Sierraville; an old **blacksmith made froe**. This is a wedge shaped cleaving tool with a wooden handle, used with a heavy wooden mallet to produce shakes or shingles. Also, a **book entitled Georgius Agricola DE RE METALLICA**. Translated from the First Latin Edition of 1556, it pertains to the development of mining methods, metallurgical processes, geology, minerology and mining law from the earliest times to the 16th century. From Lillian Stoner of Loyalton; a **small leather covered photograph album circa 1864**. This was presented to Agnes Galloway who later married H.F. Turner of Sattley. From Arch and LaVerne Monico of Sierraville; a **large 3 part mural painted on plywood sheets** from the Canyon Ranch Resort and a **canvas and oak backpack frame** used by them in their earlier backpacking days. From Margaret Wiltshire and Rosemary Schaumburg; a **431 page journal of James Galloway**, edited and typeset by Ronald Galloway Schaumburg. From the Nevada Historical Society via Bill Copren; a **copy of an original lithograph of the town of Crystal Peak**. From the Sierra County Arts Council; the acquisition of a 1985 Special Purchase Award which consists of a **large pine needle basket made by Shirley Pollard** of Sierra City and a custom oak and plexiglass display case. From Carol Griffis of Grass Valley; a **framed photograph of Myrtle Thompson, circa 1890**, who once owned the rosewood piano in the museum. From Jack and Earline Rose of Sierra City; two **newspapers from 1929 and 1935**, two **time records of the Sierra Buttes Mine from 1935 - 1938**, and a **canvas miner's cap with attached carbide lamp** used by Eric Ostrom of Sierra City in the local mines. From George W. Baker IV of Pleasant Hill; a **copy of a photograph of a group of miners in Downieville**, inscribed...  
*[continued]*



"Sierra Co. Mining Pioneers - All had struck it rich at least once during life." From John Craig of Sierra City; an old round point shovel head, an old round Shilling spice can and an old Justrite hip flask with holes punched in the lid. From Gregg Millar of Weimar; 4 sides of a Hercules powder box, dated 1926. From Warren and Marilyn Struven of San Carlos; two unidentified blacksmith made implements, a Timken rock drill bit with swivel attachment, a square glass telegraph battery jar, a mercury flask labeled Primrose Mine-Sierra City, assorted square nails in an ammo box, a rusted pocket knife with the image of a cowboy visible on one side, a loan of the following: a telegraph sounder for receiving Morse code, a speed key device for sending Morse code and a hand key device for sending Morse or Continental codes. From Denise Parodi of Graeagle; a pneumatic drill steel with star shaped bit attached and a hole through the center for water. From Margaret Burelle of Sierraville; a heavy oak mallet or "shaker" used with a froe in making shakes (well used), and a wooden box of white chalk crayons used in schools. From Michael and Betsy Webb and the collection of George S. Baker; a book entitled: **Gold Mill Practices**, published by the California State Mining Bureau in San Francisco, 1895. From Bob Montgomery of Downieville; a recently serviced Underwood manual typewriter with a 1926 patent date.

### Kentucky Mine Museum Memorials

The following donations have been received since our last publication:

**In memory of Irma G. Loeffler Ponta:**

Vern and Marilyn Ornbaun and family.

**In memory of Georgene C. Graff Copren:**

Rita Bradley, Peter and Mary Elizabeth Wendt, Paul and Virginia Nelson, Bill and Pat Rowley.

**In memory of George and Doris Baker:**

Paul and Mary Bettencourt, Jim and Terry Schaeffer, Michael and Betsy Webb and family.

**In memory of Dixie Grose:**

Arch and LaVerne Monico.

**In memory of John Berger:**

David and Beverly White.

**In memory of John Garcia Rose, Sr. and family:**

Jack and Earline Rose.

**In memory of Olga Sunkler Ostrom:**

Jack and Earline Rose.

Several new bronze plaques have been added to the Memorial wall, with more anticipated in the near future.

### Summer Concert Series and Capital Campaign

This year's concerts were again successful in a number of areas. In the tradition of the Gold Rush, they serve to provide entertainment and cultural experience to an area isolated by geography. They provide the largest percentage of the museum's annual operating budget. They stimulate interest and visitors to the park and museum's other programs. They contribute to the area businesses and the local economy.

In addition, the new stadium seating installed at the amphitheater this spring has been very well received. The engraved names on the backrests have become significant in ways we couldn't anticipate and the entire project has generated ongoing support. As such, two new benches for the center of the bottom row have arrived, engraved with the names of twelve individuals. They will be installed in the near future. This new addition provides more seating and still leaves space on the ends of the front row for those with wheelchairs. The two cast bronze plaques to recognize the support from The Thomas J. Long Foundation, Hitachi Data Systems Corporation and The Hitachi Foundation have been placed on the front walls at both entrances to the tiered seating. They are really attractive. We have also received donations toward four additional names to be engraved on the existing benches. Since names were originally engraved on every other seat, these will be held until we have one row's worth accumulated and then the remaining seats can be engraved, one row at a time, as support and space allow.

The concert series was the grateful recipient of two performer fee support grants from the California Arts Council and one production and promotion support grant from the Sierra County Arts Council. We very much appreciate their generosity.

Special thanks to Mike and Lila Heuer for taking such good care of the highway banner for us. This has included numerous years of installations, removals and repairs.

Finally, it is difficult to imagine a concert series without Dennis Messa. He has been very generous in his donation of time and technical support from the beginning. In recent years, his fiancée Li Ching has been a mainstay as well. A little appreciation can go a long way and Dennis is very much appreciated. However, without additional help, we will be guilty of taking unfair advantage of Dennis' good nature. Please contact the museum office if you would like to help with the summer concerts next year. They are important and we need YOU!

Our sincerest gratitude is extended to all those who have contributed time, attention and financial support toward the projects here and the future of the Kentucky Mine. You are our vote of confidence.

**Have a wonderful winter!**







### Featured Volunteers LINC and BILLIE MADSEN

Linc Madsen was born in Pleasanton, California, to Peter and Myrtle Madsen on April 11, 1916. Going another step back, Linc's grandfather, Frederick, had immigrated to California from Denmark in 1874. He was a ship's carpenter. He soon sent for his fiancée and her mother. That's how the Madsen family came to America.

Linc worked as an embalmer in San Francisco, Modesto and Fresno. In 1949 he established the second pet cemetery in California. He also established "Madsen's Mortuary Accommodation Service" in 1957.

Billie was born in Coffeyville, Kansas, on April 13, 1918. She met Linc on a blind date while attending Marin Junior College. They were married February 3, 1940. Billie was a full-time mother, homemaker and community volunteer until 1954 when she began work as a librarian for Fresno County. She retired a year after Linc, in 1974.

After retirement, Linc and Billie settled in Sierra County — a place they had visited many times camping. They bought the vintage (1879) Odd Fellows Hall in Sierra City. Unfortunately, the hall burned down on February 14, 1978, when Linc and Billie were on vacation in Arizona. Charlie Ervin graciously gave them his rental property and people from several counties brought food and clothing.

Linc has worked with the Historical Society as a museum volunteer, board member, and board President. Currently, he is active in the state Area Four Agency On Aging, the Master of the Masonic Lodge in Downieville and a member of the Lions Club. "We could fill a book up on the things we've volunteered for since we retired," Linc said, smiling.

Billie is active in the United Methodist Church, the UMW and served as chairperson of the Administrative Board. She was President of the Sierra City Fireman's Auxiliary and President of the Golden Rays Senior Citizens. "You just get on a committee and the next thing you know you're the president," Billie joked. Now, she is a volunteer in the state Area Four Agency on Aging and at the Downieville Library, recently starting with the Sierra County Literacy Program.

Linc and Billie agree that "volunteers live longer because it makes them feel good."

### NEW BOOKS AVAILABLE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

#### SIERRA COUNTY THE BARNs OF SIERRA VALLEY

This is a newly published 5 1/2" by 8 1/2" spiral-bound booklet featuring 75 pages and 65 photographs with an index and a map which will allow you to conduct your own driving tour of these historic barns. Also included a great deal of history and interesting highlights.

Be sure to get your copy now  
and order extras for holiday gifts.

\$15 which includes tax and shipping

Available by writing to:  
Maren Scholberg  
PO Box 141  
Sierraville, CA 96126

Also available at numerous local businesses.

Produced by the Sierra County Historical Society

### GIVE THE GIFT OF HISTORY

#### DOWNIEVILLE: GOLD TOWN ON THE YUBA by James J. Sinnott

Beautifully hard-bound reprint of the enlarged third edition. Volume one of a six volume series on the history of Sierra County that remains one of the most detailed and complete yet published. Black with gold lettering, it contains 427 pages with a six-page limited index and a dedication page to the author. Printing of this edition is limited to 1,000 copies. Suggested retail price is \$60.00. Add \$5.00 for tax, shipping and handling. "Downieville: Gold Town on the Yuba" may be purchased directly from the publisher, Karen Donaldson by writing to PO Box 115, Sierra City, CA 96125. Copies are also available at The Ruffled Goose and Sierra Gold in Downieville and at Harmony Books in Nevada City.