

THE SIERRAN

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*a member of the Conference of California Historical Societies
and the California Association of Museums*

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Cesare Dotta and Catherine Uella Dotta and family, 1918
Antone, Catherine, Dan,
Albert, Leon, Cesare Jr., Cesare Sr., Edna

Italian Swiss in Sierra Valley, Sierra County

by Maren Scholberg

The earliest settlers and ranchers in Sierra Valley came from the New England states in the mid and late 1850's. The next wave of settlers were from Switzerland.

The majority of the Italian Swiss who came to the United States beginning in 1850 were from the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino in south central Switzerland. This canton covers an area of 1,085 square miles and part of it serves as a boundary between Switzerland and Italy. About twenty thousand of the approximately twenty-seven thousand of those who immigrated from this canton went directly to California and settled in San Francisco and the surrounding valleys. The lure of gold attracted some to the gold fields of California and Nevada. Those that worked in the gold fields saved their money through frugal living in order to buy ranches and have dairies, their main objective. If they had any thought of migrating to the U.S., many young men left before they reached the age of 18 for at that age they were required to serve two years in the Swiss army.

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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!

1998 OFFICERS, DIRECTORS and STAFF

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Treasurer.....	Wanda Longsine
Secretary.....	Lauren Ranz
Membership Chair.....	Maren Scholberg
Directors.....	Rita Bradley
	[open position]
Museum Director.....	Anne Eldred
Sierran Production Staff.....	Bruce Madsen
	Lauren Ranz

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 1998:

George & JoAnn Aiello-----	Pleasant Hill, CA
Mel Arnold & Family-----	San Leandro, CA
George W. Baker IV-----	Pleasant Hill, CA
Jeffrey S. Barber-----	LaCresenta, CA
Everett & Blanche Blizzard-----	Sacramento, CA
Charles & Frances Condrotte-----	Petaluma, CA
John Finlayson-----	Walnut Creek, CA
Mary Longsine-----	Martinez, CA
Bruce & Julie Madsen-----	Sierra City, CA
J.S. & May Au Manion-----	Sierraville, CA
Don McIntosh-----	Downieville, CA
Brooks & Jackie Mitchell-----	Loyalton, CA
Winibeth Smith-----	Grass Valley, CA
Noel Turner-----	Springfield, VA
Laura Unland-----	Downieville, CA

KENTUCKY MINE MUSEUM CHANGES

Karen Donaldson, curator and museum director of the Kentucky Mine Museum for the past 16 years, has resigned, and is relocating to Nevada City, CA, as of May 1, 1998. Karen has been instrumental in bringing about the many changes and improvements in the Museum and on the grounds including, most recently, the new seats in the amphitheater, the new picnic tables, the new trestle, and the opening of the mine portal (work to be continued by Mike Miller and his miners this year). She was also responsible for the summer concert series which has been a big asset to the community and drew big crowds. But more than that, she always did a superior job conducting the stamp mill tours and answering the many questions from the public.

Her friends will miss her as will returning visitors to the Kentucky Mine. All wish her good luck, success and happiness for her future.

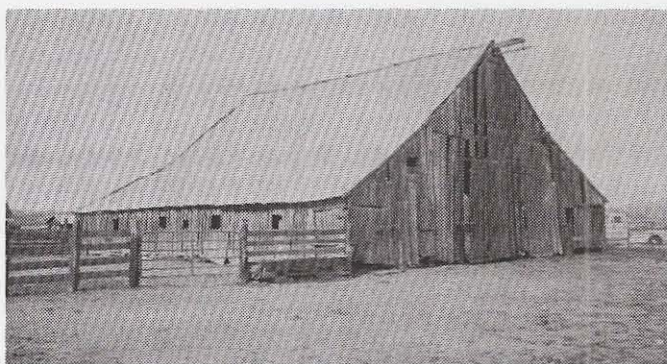
We are pleased to announce that Sierraville resident Anne Eldred has agreed to become the new curator/director of the Kentucky Mine Museum. Anne holds degrees in anthropology/archeology from the University of Southern California. She has completed a number of archeological studies in the Sierra County area both for the US Forest Service and as a private consultant. She is very excited to begin this new adventure and is looking forward to working with Historical Society members and the public.

—The Sierra County Historical Society Board

MORE BARNS OF SIERRA COUNTY/SIERRA VALLEY

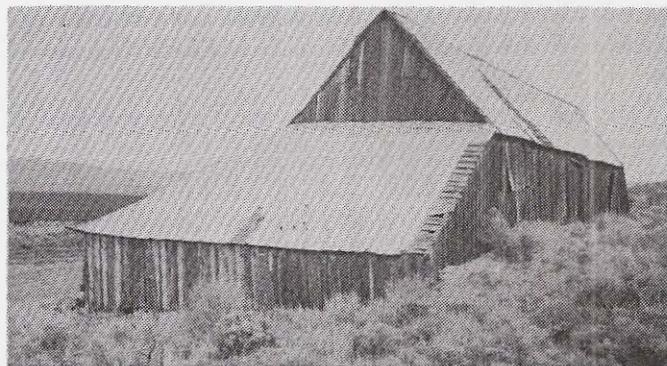
Compiled by Maren Scholberg

The first of these barns was printed in the 1997 Spring/Summer issue of THE SIERRAN. This issue features barns that go with the Italian Swiss ranchers whose history or names are written here with the exception of the Webber barn.



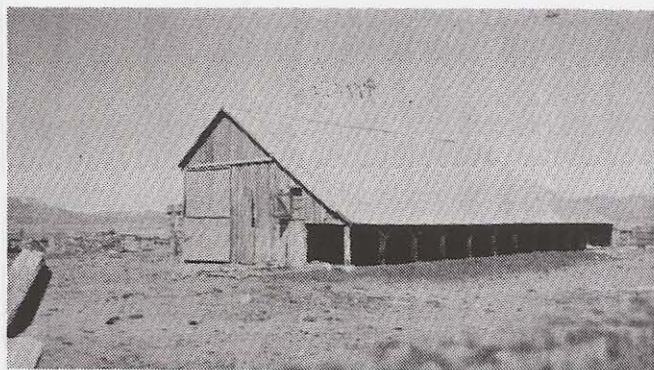
FILIPPINI BARN

This barn was moved in 1910 from the Sims Ranch, 3/4 mile to the east, to the present site. It is 30' by 60' with cedar poles used for lateral and vertical support. There are some hand hewn timbers, wooden pegs and some milled lumber. It has a cedar block foundation.



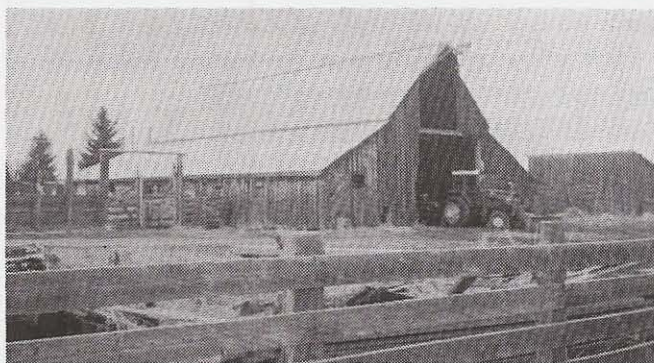
RAINES-LOMBARDI BARN

This barn, built in 1898, is a pole barn with 12 poles down each length. There is a three foot rock wall the complete length of the south side. A road ran behind the wall for the hay wagons. Four poles holding a net were raised by cable and the net was rolled into one of the three large openings on the south side. The hay was then dropped down inside. The empty barn is no longer in use. The barn was owned by P.J. Lombardi in 1889.



PODRETTI-EMIL DOTTA BARN

This barn has stanchions the complete length of the east side. When Emil's barn burned in 1953, Mr. Laffranchini gave him the Podretti barn which had been built before 1900. It was torn down and rebuilt on Emil's ranch. Part of the Frank Amodei barn was also used in rebuilding this barn. The barn is now used for storing hay.



RAINES-GRANDI BARN

There are eight 10" by 10" hand hewn beams on each side for support with stanchions and mangers on both sides. The foundation is cedar chunks on cement blocks. The barn presently holds some hay and is otherwise used for storage.

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Italian Swiss in Sierra County

[Continued from page 1]

As early as 1860, a few of the Italian Swiss were coming to the northern end of Sierra Valley around Chilcoot, Vinton and Beckwourth. They liked the Valley with the surrounding mountains because it reminded them of their native country. These sturdy, honest and industrious people worked hard to buy land and establish ranches of their own.

In the 1880's, many of these Italian Swiss found work and land available in the Sierra County part of Sierra Valley. They purchased established ranches of the pioneers who were ready to move on. In general they were better managers of the land than their predecessors. They added acreage to their holdings and were willing to introduce improved methods of raising crops of hay and grain and to bring in new breeds of cattle, both beef and dairy. As economic conditions changed, they altered their general pattern of farming and ranching. They were the settlers who helped create stable and lasting communities. They were successful ranchers. Their descendants today are prominent ranchers and business men.

The following people were the earliest Italian Swiss ranchers in Sierra County/Sierra Valley.

CAESARE DOTTA

Caesare was born in Fontana, Canton Ticino, Switzerland in 1861. He came to the U.S. and directly to Sierra Valley in 1883. He went to work for Lodovico Dotta who had come to the Valley in 1879. (Lodovico is the father of Thelma Weathers and the grandfather of Elia Miles, both of Loyalton, CA).

With his brother-in-law, Antone Laffranchini, he established a ranch about 6 miles west of Vinton, CA. Caesare sold out to Antone in 1896 and then rented the Cunningham Ranch--now known as the Sobrio Ranch--which consisted of 320 acres where he operated a dairy and sold butter and cheese. He was among the first to make butter in the Valley. In 1889, Caesare purchased the Gould Ranch in Sierra County which later became known as the Dotta Home Ranch. It consisted of 840 acres of some of the finest meadow and hay land in the Valley. He continued to enlarge his holdings so that in 1903, he owned 5200 acres. He had a herd of about 1000 cattle and milked about 60 cows. He incorporated his holdings with his sons under the name of Caesare Dotta and Sons.

Six sons and a daughter were born to Caesare and Caterina Vella Dotta (also from Canton Ticino). There are several descendants of this family in the Valley

today: Adella Lombardi, a granddaughter, Emil Dotta, the oldest grandson, and Bing Dotta, a great grandson.

RAFAELE DOTTA

Rafaele Dotta immigrated to the U.S. from Fontana, Canton Ticino, Switzerland and came to Sierra Valley with Caesare Dotta (a very distant relative) in 1883. In the mid 1880's, Rafaele bought land north of Loyalton, CA and added to that acreage until he had 1160 acres. He helped to establish the Loyalton Cooperative Creamery and the Bank of Loyalton, of which he was president from 1921-1928. He sold his property to Lucky Hereford Corporation in the 1960's. Rafaele left no heirs.

PONPEO JOHN (P.J.) LOMBARDI

P.J., another resident of Canton Ticino, Switzerland, came to the U.S. in 1884 and worked for several years in the San Francisco, CA area. He came to Sierra Valley in 1889 and bought the Smith Raines Ranch of 360 acres which was 2 miles west of Loyalton, CA. He soon owned 3000 acres which was one of the larger ranches of the valley.

P.J. started with a herd of 10 cows which was built up to 60 head of dairy cattle. He operated a milk route during the 1890's and early 1900's selling products of his Excelsior Dairy. Both beef and dairy cattle were raised until 1935 at which time the dairy was discontinued.

In 1886, P.J. married Angelina Ramelli who was also a native of Canton Ticino. She was a sister to Matteo Ramelli (see RAMELLI).

When P.J. died, his son, Louis, took over the ranch until 1958 when he sold out to Robert E. Overman. Dr. Louis A. Payen now owns the ranch north of Highway # 49.

The only descendant living in the Valley today is a grandson, Alvin Lombardi.

ISAAC MARTINETTI

Isaac was born in 1873 in Canton Ticino, Switzerland. At the age of 16, he came to the U.S. and went directly to Sierra City where he did hydraulic mining for several years. He saved his money and bought a stallion which he then bred to mares at the different ranches in Sierra Valley. At the Allesandro (Alec) Guidici Ranch near Chilcoot, CA., Isaac met Delia Guidici (one of three daughters of Alec and Sophia Roberti Guidici) and they were married in 1913. (Alec Guidici and Sophia were also from Canton Ticino.)

Isaac and Delia lived in Reno a short time before establishing a home in Verdi, NV where their daughter, Rita was born in 1914. In 1916, Isaac and Delia purchased the Theophilus Maddux property near Sattley, CA which had been established in the early 1850's. They

had both beef and dairy herds and sold cream to the Sierra Valley Creamery.

Three girls and a boy were born to the Martinetti couple. The son, Elver, purchased the ranch from his mother upon the death of his father, Isaac. In recent years, the pasture has been rented out to ranchers from the Sacramento Valley.

Descendants of Isaac and Delia who live in the Valley today include their daughter, Rita Bradley, their son, Elver, who with his wife, Barbara, live on the family ranch; two grandsons, John and Jess Martinetti, a granddaughter, Ann Martinetti, a granddaughter, Nancy Bradley Harnach and five great grandchildren who live in the Sattley-Calpine area.



P.J. Lombardi & Angiolina Romelli Lombardi
Married January 10, 1885

JOHN GENASCI

John came to Sierra Valley in 1893 from Canton Ticino, Switzerland. He worked for several years on various ranches, saved his money and bought a 440 acre ranch which is presently the Louis Genasci Ranch, two miles north and west of Loyalton. In 1909, more acreage

was added with the purchase of the Dan Ebe ranch and part of the Mary and Joseph Gloster ranch. This land is now part of the Attilio Genasci ranch located about four miles west of Loyalton, CA. The 520 Walter Robbins ranch was later added to this property.

In 1928, John Genasci purchased the Connely ranch adjacent to the Genasci home ranch and this became the Julio Genasci ranch.

In 1898, John married Perpetua Dotta, sister to Rafaele Dotta. John died in 1933 and the ranch properties went to his three sons, Louis, Attilio and Julio. Julio recently passed away. There was one daughter, Silvia, who married and moved to Oakland, CA.

There are two grandsons in the area. Jim Genasci, son of Attilio and the late Angie Genasci, with his wife, Mary and their two sons, reside on the Attilio Genasci ranch. Carl Genasci, son of Louis and Selma Genasci, resides on the Louis Genasci ranch with his wife Ann.

JULIUS FILIPPINI

Another resident of Canton Ticino, Julius Filippini, came to Sierra Valley in 1896. His mother was a sister to P.J. Lombardi. Julius worked for two years on ranches in the Valley before buying the Daniel Gloster Ranch in 1898. To the 1000 acres, Julius added 300 more buying acreage from the Simms ranch which adjoined the Filippini property on the east side.

Julius had a dairy where butter and cream were sold to the local creamery in Loyalton. Wheat, rye and hay sufficient for the stock were raised on the ranch as was the case for the other ranches. He ceased dairying in 1942 and since then, the work was in raising beef cattle.

Julius married Erminia Torri and they had a daughter and one son, George, who took over the family ranch when his father died in 1942.

Descendants in the area include two grandsons and five great grandchildren. Mike Filippini is principal of Loyalton High School and has a home on the family ranch where he resides with his wife Pam, and their two sons. Tim Filippini and his wife and three children reside in Portola, CA.

MATTEO RAMELLI

Matteo Ramelli was born in Airolo, Ticino Canton, Switzerland on July 29, 1862. He was one of eleven children. In 1879, his oldest brother, Emilio, was the first to come to Sierra Valley. His wife had an uncle living in the Valley who wanted to go back to their home land so he gave Emilio his ranch with the understanding that

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Emileo would send for all his brothers and sisters as soon as he could save the necessary money for their passage. Emilio fulfilled his promise and brought all ten over.

Matteo bought a ranch on the Sierra/Plumas county line which had been owned by earlier settlers. Matteo added the LaFranchini ranch to his holdings. The present owners of the ranch, Mervin and Pat Ramelli, have in their possession the homestead papers issued to those first owners. They are signed by Ulysses S. Grant in 1872, Rutherford Hayes in 1879, Benjamin Harrison in 1892, Grover Cleveland in 1894 and 1896, and Theodore Roosevelt in 1906.

In 1889, Matteo married Maria Ramelli, daughter of Henry Ramelli and Mary Stifian, both of Ticino Canton. Of their seven children, Attilio, the third child was born in 1894. He and his wife Amelia Tagnalda, lived on the family ranch and raised three children: Mervin, Kenneth and Viona. Mervin and his wife, Pat, presently reside on the ranch.

Descendants of Matteo living in the area are two grandsons, Melvin and Kenneth; a great grandson, Greg Ramelli and a great granddaughter, Julie Ramelli Sheckla, and five great, great grandchildren.

JULIO TORRI

Other residents of Canton Ticino who left and came to Sierra Valley were Julio and Emelia Torri. They came about 1905 and Julio worked in several places before buying his own ranch.

In 1917, he purchased the 720-acre ranch of F.M. Rowland located about four miles east of Sierraville. Many acres had been added to the original ranch which dates back to 1869. He had a Grade A dairy and a dairy barn which was built in 1945-46.

Julio's son, Pasquale and his wife Irene, took over the ranch in 1943. In 1956, Pasquale and his son, Kenneth, operated the ranch as strictly a beef-cattle operation and no longer operated the dairy. In 1965, Ken became the sole owner and presently lives on the ranch.

Descendants living in the area are the grandson, Ken; a great grandson, Casey Torri, and his three children who live in the Loyalton-Sierraville area.

ODO GRANDI

Odo Grandi, born in 1884 in Breno, Canton Ticino, came by himself to the U.S. in 1901 at the age of 17. He landed in New York City, took the train from there to Reno. He worked for several years in the Reno area, saving his money, came to Sierra Valley and bought the Lathrop Ranch which was located about eight miles

north of Loyalton. He sold this ranch in 1914 and purchased the Doug Raines Ranch of about 60 acres and located one mile west of Loyalton, CA. 320 more acres were later purchased by Mr. Grandi. He owned and operated a dairy from the early 1900's until 1937 at which time it was up-graded to a Grade A dairy. Milking machines were purchased in 1942.

In 1945, Odo's sons, Leo and Joseph, leased the ranch and as partners operated the dairy. Odo then retired. The sons operated the dairy until 1962-- the last Grade A dairy in Sierra County. After that, they sold their milk to the Sierra Valley Creamery, run by Dario D'Andrea since 1850. This creamery had previously been owned by Attilio Lombardi and was called The Sierra Valley Dairy. After Mr. D'Andrea terminated his creamery business in 1961, the Grandis' sold their milk to a dairy in Reno.

Leo Grandi bought the ranch on the north side of Hwy 49 from his father in 1962; Joseph became the owner of the ranch on the south side. Grandi heirs now own the properties.

Odo married Josephine Guidici, daughter of Bernardo Guidici (also from Canton Ticino) and his wife Catherine. Josephine was born in Sierra Valley.

Today, two grandsons, Chris and Eino Grandi reside in the Loyalton-Sierraville area as well as five great grandchildren.

(It is interesting to note the many marriages that joined those early Italian Swiss families.)

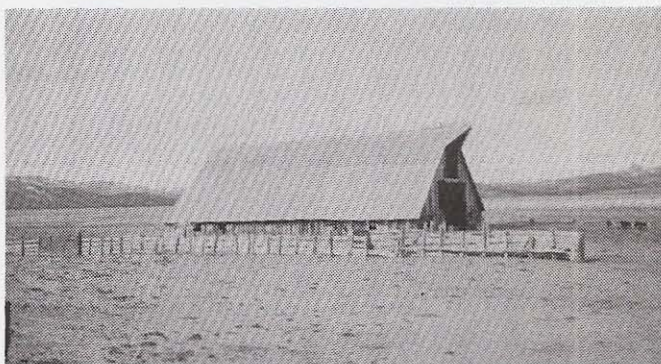
The following are names of some of the other Italian Swiss who came into Sierra Valley at a later time: Maddelena, Guscetti, Scolari, Solari, Sobrio, Ponci, Podesta, Dellera, Amodei, Bonta, Trosi, Polanti, Roberti, Vanetti and Pasquetti (Italian and Italian Swiss), D'Andrea (Italian and Italian Swiss).

Compiled by Maren Scholberg who wishes to thank Alvin and Adele Lombardi and Rita Bradley for all their help with names and dates.

The following were used for source books:

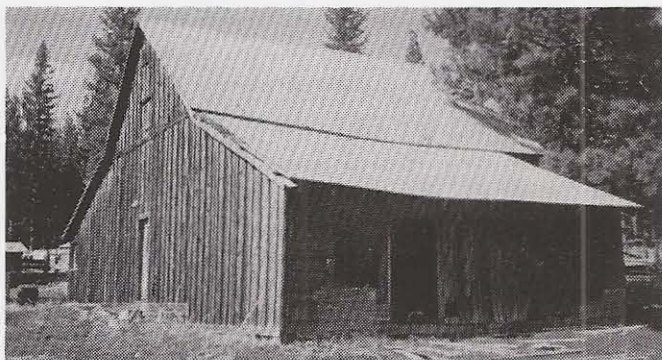
- "Sierra Valley, Jewel of the Sierras" by James J. Sinnott
- "History of the Sacramento Valley", Vol 111.
- "Italian Swiss Settlement of Plumas County 1860-1920"

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ROBBINS-GENASCI BARN

The original part of this early barn is of pole construction. It has a hewn stone foundation. An extension of 32 feet was added in 1937 by Harry Newman, grandson of David Derr Newman who built many of the early barns in the valley. Lumber from the Calpine sawmill and plant which was being dismantled was used at a price of \$8.00 a thousand board feet.



CHURCH-MARTINETTI-BRADLEY BARN

This barn was built circa 1875 and has hand hewn timbers. At one time it held two wagons; there is a stall for 3 or 4 horses. A lean-to was added in 1939 which was later used for a chicken coop. The barn is presently used for storage.

The first owner of the property was Isaac Church, one of the early New England settlers, who owned it when the barn was built. It was sold to Isaac and Delia Martinetti 1941 and then their daughter, Rita, and her husband, Harry Bradley, became the owners. Rita Bradley presently resides in the ranch house.

WEBBER-CHURCH BARN

Only a small portion of this barn still stands. It was built when Dr. David Gould Webber owned the ranch in 1859. He spent the winters on the ranch, returning to his holding at Webber Lake and the hotel he operated each summer. Charlie Church bought the ranch about 1898 and later his son, John, became the owner. Loyalton residents, Edith Church Huntley and her brother, the late Ezra Church who died in 1997 at the age of 96, along with brothers and sisters,

were raised on this ranch. It is now owned by the Bar None Ranch.

An interesting connection to Dr. Webber is in the following story.

Casey Killebrew, who lives on the Strang Ranch near Sattley, has in his possession a diary written by Mrs. Epperson, his great great grandmother, when she went from Illinois to Yuba City, CA with her husband and small son in a wagon in 1864. The journey started April 1, from Coles County, Ill. A day by day account was written telling of the country, the people, the weather, the food and the many problems that arose.

On August 1st they were in Austin, NV and in Truckee Meadows on August 28th. On August 30, Mrs. Epperson was taken sick during the night. but she was so anxious to reach Yuba City that she insisted upon going on. The next day "they passed through Beckwith into Sierra Valley. Drove to Mr. Ead's (Ede) ranch where we got good pasture and the use of a little house where I could be made more comfortable than in our wagon. Mrs. Ead did all she could for us." One of the men of the wagon train rode thirty miles to get Dr. Webber to come and administer to Mrs. Epperson. He was not at home but a message was left for him. "Was sick for several days. Finally Dr. Webber came and gave me some medicine which soon gave relief. He refused pay for his visit; we were very thankful to him and hope some day it will be my privilege to pay him tenfold." They stayed there until Sept. 10th and camped the next night near Webber Lake. where she "had a view of the lake" but she was "unable to get out and walk around".

They arrived in Yuba City and Mr. Epperson's ranch on September 16. (He had lived there before his marriage and had left his brother in charge of his ranch until he returned from his visit to Illinois.) It was a joyous occasion to be home!

A footnote: They were in their new California home only two weeks when Casey's great grandmother was born!! Never once did Mrs. Epperson mention in her diary why she did not feel well or why she was 'sick' in Sierra Valley and needed a doctor's care!

My thanks to Casey and Joleen Torri for sharing this very interesting diary.



1998 KENTUCKY MINE SUMMER CONCERT SERIES

DATE	PERFORMANCE
July 3	ALKALI — "Last of the 49ers" and the New Sierra Nevada Rangers — Stories & songs from the pioneer days.
July 10	HAWKS & EAGLES — Jimmy & Nancy Borsdorf and the brand of cowboy-gypsy music.
July 17	JODY STECHER & KATE BRISLIN — Old time country music flavored with bluegrass, blues, folk & a touch of cajun.
July 24	SOURDOUGH SLIM & THE SADDLE PALS — Yodeling cowboy entertainer with Cactus Bob and Prairie Flower.
July 31	PAST DUE & PLAYABLE — Regional favorites — bluegrass, swing, country & folk.
Aug 7	THE CARL VAST QUARTET featuring BOB DREW — A swinging parade of show tunes, standards and bossa nova.
Aug 14	THE BLACK IRISH BAND — brings music of the 1800's to life with influences of Celtic, Italian & traditional folk songs.
Aug 21	JIM KING, BOB WEBBER & KAY HANSEN — an evening of cowboy poetry & song from a winning trio.
Aug 28	McAVOY LAYNE as MARK TWAIN and GORDY the BANJO-OLOGIST — Stories, humor & music from the 1800's.
Sept 4	BOBBIE WEBB & THE SMOOTH BLUES BAND — By popular demand, this perennial favorite serves up our lively finale.

~STILL AVAILABLE~

THE BARNs OF SIERRA VALLEY

A spiral-bound booklet featuring 64 barn photographs including some history and interesting highlights. Published in the fall of 1997.

\$15 includes tax and shipping

Available by writing to:

Maren Scholberg

PO Box 141

Sierraville, CA 96126

Produced by the Sierra County Historical Society



Featured Volunteer LOIS KEELER

Lois Keeler was born in Glendale, CA on Aug. 5, 1922. She lived in the San Fernando Valley until moving to Sattley in October of 1982. During her years in Southern California, she attended high school in Van Nuys and college in Santa Barbara; raised four children and worked for 20 years for the State of California in the Employment Development Department. She has always been a 'joiner' and participated in many capacities as a volunteer and officer in several organizations.

After retirement, Lois moved to Sattley, CA with her second husband, Bill. They love Sierra Valley and had visited the area before buying their present home.

Lois joined the Cattlewomen's Association and with her husband, the Sierra County Historical Society where Lois has been privileged to work as a volunteer at the Kentucky Mine for the past several years. She has also appeared in four productions of the Sierra Valley Players and has served as the treasurer the past two years. She loves to play bridge and travel with her husband. In their 22 years of marriage, they have traveled to every state and done a bit of cruising with more to come.

Lois enjoys her time at the Kentucky Mine and thinks of it as an opportunity to help people know more of the gold rush days. Giving a smile and a welcome brings many pleasant exchanges with people from all over the world.