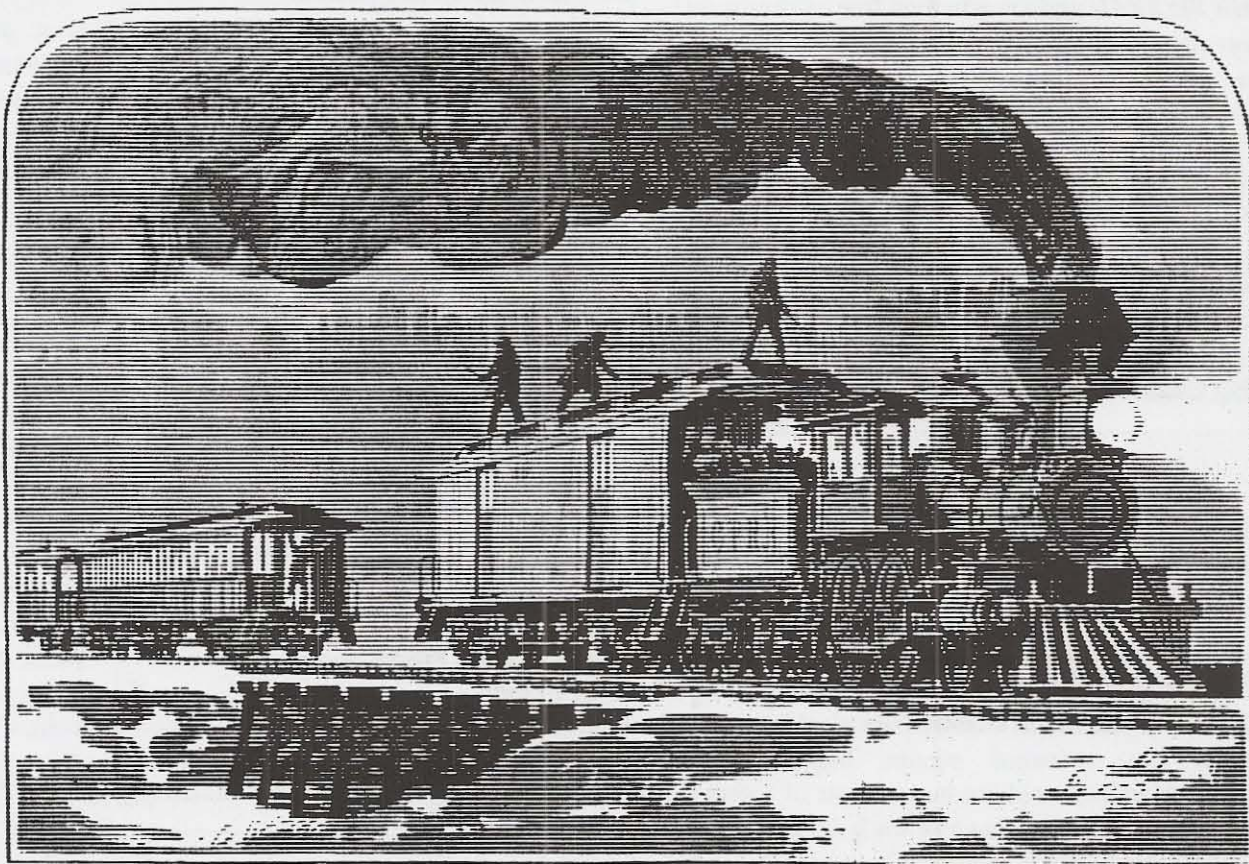


THE SIERRAN

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

Volume XXVII, Number 1

Spring/Summer 1999



*Artist's Conception of Separation of Express Car from Passenger Cars
From Wells Fargo Bank Archives*

The Verdi Train Robbery

By Philip I. Earl

The driving of the Golden Spike at Promontory, Utah, on May 10, 1869, signaled the completion of the first transcontinental railroad, and the beginning of a new era in the history of the American West. The railroad opened up the West to new settlement, created new communities and opened new markets for cattle, timber and other western products. It also provided opportunities for some enterprising Westerners to branch out from bank holdups and stage robbery to train robbery.

The first train robbery on the Pacific Slope took place just west of Reno near what is today the River Inn. The afternoon of November 4, 1870, Central Pacific No. 1 left Oakland, California, for Ogden, Utah carrying \$41,800 in \$20 gold pieces and \$8,800 in silver bars, the coin a payroll shipment for the Comstock mines and the bullion for deposit in Nevada banks to cover commercial drafts.

[Please turn to page 6]

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!

1999 OFFICERS, DIRECTORS and STAFF

President.....	Bill Copren
Vice President.....	Bill Long
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Directors.....	Rita Bradley
Lee Adams
Charlie McCarty
Museum Director.....	Anne Eldred
<i>THE SIERRAN</i> Production Staff.....	Bruce Madsen
Maren Scholberg

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 FAX: (530) 862-1312

FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD

The Kentucky Mine Museum will open on May 29th for the 1999 season with Anne Eldred in her second year as curator and tour guide. We feel very fortunate in having Anne and we have been keeping her busy.

Many interesting events are being scheduled for the summer – note the Annual Meeting in May and the LIVING HISTORY DAY in July on the enclosed flyer. Later there will be several day tours of historic spots in the county led by Lee Adams.

The Concert Series committee has added a pre-concert dinner on Saturday nights. (See back page.) Numerous outstanding prizes will be raffled off at each concert.

To all those who volunteered at the Museum last summer, we extend our sincere THANK YOU. We are counting on your help again this year.

It will be a busy summer! Hope to see you there.

SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP REPORT

We welcome the following as new members for 1999:

Elwood & Della Brooks	-----	Sierra City, CA
Doug & Suzanne Burr	-----	Downieville, CA
David Dee/Pat Callahan	-----	Kentfield, CA
John Finlayson	-----	Salem, OR
Kristie Gartner	-----	San Leandro, CA
May Gardner	-----	San Francisco, CA
Jim Giel/Gloria Powell	-----	Reno, NV
Ryan Grandi	-----	Sierraville, CA
Alan & Ellen Green	-----	Lincoln, CA
Mike & Lila Heuer	-----	Sierra City, CA
High Country Inn	-----	Sierra City, CA
Karen Hildebrand Household	-----	Calpine, CA
Travis & Janet Keahey	-----	Placerville, CA
Charles J. McCarty	-----	Sierra City, CA
Ken & Carol Newcombe	-----	Downieville, CA

The board appreciates the continued interest and financial support of ALL the members, which includes the Supporting Members, the Sustaining Members, the Business Members and the Institutions. They are what keep the Historical Society moving ahead. Our Thanks to each of you!

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INDEX FOR SALE!!!

An Index for ALL of the Sierra County *BULLETINS* & *SIERRANS* (1969 – 1998) is for sale for \$10.00. Included is a listing of articles on people, mines, agriculture, logging, schools, churches, public buildings, towns, and east side and west side information. Send \$11.00, which includes postage to Maren Scholberg, PO Box 141, Sierraville, CA 96126. Old *BULLETINS* and *SIERRANS* for sale at \$5.00 per copy.

Belle Alexander (1873 – 1953)

Superintendent of Sierra County Schools 1908 - 1940

This is a condensed conclusion of "Aunt Belle's Story" and tells of her experiences on the East side of Sierra County. Again we thank Jeff and Carole Chandler of Loyalton for the loan of their book to us.

My trips to the eastern part of the County were usually made by horse stage during my earlier terms as Superintendent and later by auto stage, as I could go through from Downieville to Sierraville by noon and have an afternoon in which to visit either Sattley or Sierraville Schools. I then had to depend on hiring a vehicle to go to outlying schools though I sometimes went to Loyalton by stage.

Strange as it may seem, it was often harder to get a conveyance in Sierra Valley than in Downieville, even though it was a farming community and nearly every family owned a horse and buggy or later an auto. there were no livery stables where horses were kept for hire and if haying was in progress very few farmers were able to spare either a horse or driver. Fortunately, I had relatives in Sierra Valley and I could sometimes get some of them to take me where I wished to go. It took careful planning on my part to do most of my traveling outside of school hours so I could spend as much time as possible in the class room.

On one of my trips to the Sierra Valley I could get no conveyance and my cousin who was a Forest Ranger let me have his horse and buggy to drive to Loyalton. I rarely drove alone but usually persuaded one of my girl cousins to accompany me. Being unable to find one who was free to go I drove to Loyalton alone on this occasion and made the trip safely.

The difficulty in driving one horse was that one had to watch so closely to keep him in the middle of the road as most vehicles were drawn by two horses and naturally

the center of the road was not so smooth and even at the sides where other animals had beaten a path. If the horse went too far to one side the buggy was too near the edge of the road for my peace of mind and if to the other, the wheels were too close to the bank.

When I reached Loyalton again and finished my work there it was about four o'clock. The wind had sprung up and was blowing a gale. I did not realize just how strong it was until I was well out on the road beyond Loyalton where the full force of the wind struck me. Big trucks had been used to haul logs from a mill some distance out of Loyalton and at times the dust was so thick I could not see where I was going but the horse kept the road.

Once I met an empty truck drawn by several horses and was almost on it before I could see it but it was on its side of the road and I was passing it almost before I realized it was there.

Between Loyalton and Sierraville a long point juts out into the valley and the road extends up the hill here and around the point. I wondered how I could get around the point on the narrower road if the wind were blowing as violently when I reached it. Fortunately the wind was not so strong on the Sierraville side and I had no difficulty. It is needless to say I was glad to reach my Aunt's house.

Another time I drove to Loyalton and a girl cousin accompanied me. We usually left Loyalton very early in the morning and it would be almost dark by the time we again reached the town.

The road entered the valley at the home of a man and wife who were very good friends of mine and always expected me to stay to lunch so I planned to do so.

We reached the farm house before noon and were surprised to find no signs of life about the place excepting some animals so I decided to drive on to the school house, a couple of miles distant. When we reached the school house we saw no children and the building appeared to be deserted. I climbed out of the buggy and going to the door, rapped loudly, but there was no reply and we decided that for some reason school was not in session that day.

When we returned to the house, it was still deserted so there was nothing to be done but return to Loyalton. We reached Loyalton about dinner time that evening and it is needless to say we did justice to the food set before us. I learned later that the people at whose house we expected to eat lunch had decided to go to Reno on business and the teacher was given a holiday so she could accompany them.

[continued]

Belle Alexander, Superintendent

[Continued from page 3]

The man was clerk of the district and I found that in some small districts the clerk usually decided certain questions that came up without consulting the other trustees as it was not easy to get the three trustees together on short notice where they lived miles apart as there was not telephone.

In some districts the clerk literally "Ran the School", even to the extent of deciding upon the teacher to be hired even though they had been told that the consent of at least two trustees was necessary for the transaction of business; but in most such cases the other trustees were content to let the clerk shoulder the responsibility.

There was another small district up in the hills surrounding Sierra Valley where a saw mill had been built and in time enough families moved in to make it legal to form a school district.

This district was in existence for a number of years until all available timber had been converted into lumber and then the mill was dismantled and the machinery removed elsewhere. Of course the families moved away and the district was declared lapsed.

There were no business houses here – stores, hotels, etc., excepting a company store where some groceries were kept for the men whose families were not there. We ate our lunch in the boarding house – a building containing a long table with long benches on either side – at the same time the men were served, as a cook was employed and people were expected to be on hand at lunchtime. The food was good as a rule – the regulation diet served at most lumber camps.

Long after this school had been declared lapsed and the mill and buildings had been torn down and moved away I had occasion to go up this canyon to Sardine Valley on an electioneering trip.

A young man who had taught a term or two in the county decided to run for School Superintendent so I felt it wise to interview some of the voters, though I had been assured by many of my friends and acquaintances that I would be re-elected.

My aunt accompanied me on this trip and drove a horse belonging to my uncle as she often drove to nearby towns in the Valley but did not drive much in the hills. It was when autos were appearing in Sierra County and many horses were afraid of them and were apt to become unmanageable on narrow roads where the auto was obliged to be driven close to them.



Satley Schoolhouse – 1920's
Photo courtesy of Rita Bradley

We did not expect to meet an auto on this seldom traveled road but as the horse usually became frightened when approached by an auto my aunt was afraid she might not be able to manage him on the narrow road. She cautioned me to be ready to get out and stand at the horse's head should we meet one.

We were driving along and chatting busily when suddenly an auto appeared coming toward us. We had not heard it as it was coming down hill so it was not far distant when we saw it. How I reached the horse's head so quickly I hardly know. I placed one hand on the wheel and bounding to the ground I ran to the horse's head and grasped the reins in order to keep him quiet. To my mortification, as well as relief, the horse stood as still as a post and never even turned his head as the auto passed and every occupant of the car had a broad grin on his face. I can realize how comical it was.


One fall I paid my visit to Sierra Valley rather late and it rained while I was making my rounds to the several districts. Having completed my work on one side of the Valley I started quite late for the other side as I wanted to leave next day for home. The sky was overcast somewhat when I started on my fourteen mile drive accompanied by one of my girl cousins. Knowing it was moonlight at the time we thought we could see to drive even though there were some clouds.

We had not yet reached a rocky point extending into the valley over which the road wound when it commenced getting dark and a few miles further on we could not see the road. Dense dark clouds gathered so no trace of the moon was visible. I drove very slowly straining my eyes to see where we were but finally knew by the bumping of the buggy that we were not in the road. I was not particularly worried just there as the ground near the road was covered with grass and small clumps of sage brush and was level. Knowing we were about to ascend the hill to go over the point I decided we could not go on as we still had four or five miles to go. To our right was a farm house back a short distance from the road and we could see a dim light so decided to go in and see if we could get a lantern. The man who owned the place was surprised enough to see us but insisted upon our staying all night as there was an extra room we could occupy. He went out and attended to the horse while his housekeeper prepared the room for our use. I knew my relatives would not be worried as they would think we had staid (sic) over until morning. We found the people very hospitable and were glad indeed we did not have to trust to getting home safely in the dark.

Sometimes it was quite difficult to get accommodations in mining or lumbering towns where many people were employed as often all the rooms were taken, especially if tourists or traveling men were in town. In one mining town I had difficulty several times. Once the girl who waited on the table in the dining room gave up her room to me and staid (sic) overnight with some of her girl friends. Her room was small and not very well ventilated and her belongings were scattered about but I was glad to find a place to sleep.

Few of the rooms contained stoves so it was usually too cold to sit in one's room. On one visit to the town, I decided to go to the parlor and spend the evening there as I knew where it was. To my astonishment, when I opened the door I found it had been converted into a bedroom, as a bed occupied one corner. Once, I was given a room over the bar room and men played cards until long past midnight and there was so much noise that I could not sleep.

Another time I was told there were no rooms vacant and was about to go on to the next town though I would have to come back next day in order to visit the school. Suddenly the landlady decided she could give me a room that was occupied by a mining man but he had gone away for a few days and I could have the room. I had some misgivings, as I felt it was not right for her to let someone else have the room as long as he was paying for it, but she was so sure it would be perfectly all right that I took it. I locked my door, as I naturally would in a hotel, and being tired slept soundly. Sometime during the night I was awakened by voices in the hall near my door and wondered about the commotion but did not know the reason till the next morning when the landlady told me that the gentleman had returned in the night and was naturally rather disturbed to find she had given the room to someone else. She did not tell me where she arranged to have him sleep – no doubt with some of the other men who had lodgings there.



The Verdi Train Robbery

[continued from page 1]

Meanwhile, five men were holed up in an abandoned mine tunnel on the south face of Peavine Mountain overlooking the Central Pacific right-of-way. A.J. "Jack" Davis, the leader of the gang, received a wire sent by John E. Chapman to R.A. "Sol" Jones that read, "Send me sixty dollars and charge to my account." Signed J. Enrique." The cryptic message indicated to Davis and his confederates that an express car carrying \$60,000 had just left Oakland and would be across the Sierra within a few hours. Davis then began to put the second part of his plan into operation. He and his men rode out at sunset for the old stone quarry near Lawton's Springs where they proceeded to build a tie and rock barrier across the tracks.

The Number 1 was due in Verdi four miles west, about 10:00 P.M. Engineer Henry S. Small was delayed by an accident further up the line, thus it was midnight when he saw the lights of the small lumber town. As the train slowed going through town, five men wearing linen dusters and black masks swung aboard, three onto the open platform of the express car behind the tender and two on the back of the car where it was coupled to the day coaches and the night sleepers. Two of the men crawled over the wood pile, dropped down into the engine compartments and covered Small and his fireman with their revolvers.

Small was ordered to proceed a half mile east and then whistle "down breaks," long enough to allow the two men on the rear of the express to pull the coupling pin and set the rest of the train adrift. Small was then ordered to proceed to the barricade near the quarry.

Davis took charge and marched the frightened engineer back to the express car and had him knock on the door. "Who's there?" came the reply from guard Frank Mitchell. "Small," the engineer said, whereupon Mitchell opened the door to find himself confronted by three double-barreled shotguns. The men secured crowbars and opened the treasure boxes, throwing the sacks of coin out the side door. Thanking Mitchell for not giving them any trouble, Davis added that they were glad that they did not have to kill him. Davis locked Small, Mitchell and the fireman in the express car while the others stuffed the money into their saddle bags. Mounting their horses, they rode off into the night.

News of the robbery was telegraphed to the Wells Fargo agent in Virginia City, who notified Sheriff Charlie Pegg in Washoe City. Pegg and his deputy,

James H. Kinkead, formed a posse of fourteen men and headed for the Sierra, having been informed that the robbers had gone southwest. They found no trace of them in that direction. Unofficial posses seeking the \$40,000 in reward money offered by Wells Fargo, the Central Pacific Railroad and the State of Nevada, found evidence that the men had gone northwest toward California.

Jack Davis and his men split the money at the quarry near Lawton's before going their separate ways. James Gilchrist, a miner who was having his first fling as a train robber, E.B. Parsons and John Squires went to Sardine Valley where they took rooms at Pearson's Hotel. Parsons and Squires left the following morning, but Gilchrist remained. When Deputy Kinkead arrived later in the day, he was informed that two men had left for the north, but Gilchrist was still in his room. Gilchrist's actions aroused the lawman's suspicions and he was arrested. Gilchrist identified the other two men and Parsons and Squires were soon arrested. Kinkead wired Nevada Governor Henry Blasdel for extradition papers, and the three were brought back to Nevada. Davis had meanwhile been arrested in Virginia City, and Tilton Cockerell and Sol Jones were found in Reno. Chaty Roberts, who ran a stage station at Antelope just across the California line, was also arrested, as was Chapman, the contact man in California.

Sol Jones pleaded guilty and received a five year sentence. Davis got ten years, Cockerell was sentenced to twenty-two years, and both Parsons and Squires received twenty years each. Chapman was sentenced to eighteen years for his part, although he claimed he was in California when the robbery took place.

All but \$3,000 of the money was recovered, and there is speculation to this day that it remains buried on Peavine or somewhere along the Truckee River near the site of the robbery. If found, the 150 coins would be worth over \$500,000.

Another Account Adds Color

From Harold's Club Book Vol. 1, "This was Nevada"

Deputy Kinkead gets credit for tracking down one of the robbers by following the print of a high heeled boot in the snow. It was a tiny pointed heel...a dandy's boot. It led him to the hotel in Sardine Valley (Sierra County in California) where Gilchrist told Kinkead that the other two had left for the north.

After Gilchrist was arrested, Kinkead continued to follow the boot track and it lead him to Loyalton, Calif., where he surprised his quarry asleep in a lodging house. He was arrested and the boots were confiscated for evidence. That same morning Kinkead succeeded in nabbing another suspect on a ranch near Sierraville. Knowing he had made arrests out of his jurisdiction, Kinkead took both men to Truckee to await extradition. The high heeled boots were used as evidence to help convict Nevada's first train robbers.

Another Version of the Sardine Valley Scene

From Wells Fargo Bank files in San Francisco

John Squires arrived at the Pearson Tavern in Sardine Valley and had ordered supper when C.B. Parsons and James Gilchrist arrived. They seemed to give no sign of recognition of Squires, Mrs. Pearson noted. Squires went up to his room and a little later Parsons and Gilchrist took a room across the hall from him. Mrs. Pearson became suspicious of the squeaky floor boards above her room and the muffled conversation going on. Squires was telling the two other men where he had hidden his share of the loot.

Early next morning Mrs. Pearson was surprised to see Squires and Parsons ride off together just before Reno Wells Fargo agent Hammond and Deputy Sheriff Lamb arrived. After learning of the departure of the two men, Hammond and Lamb took off after them. Gilchrist, who had been watching all this, sneaked out to the outhouse in back. Mrs. Pearson's curiosity knew no bounds and she approached the outhouse from behind and without a trace of feminine shyness, applied an eye to a convenient knot-hole. She watched Gilchrist pour thousands of gold pieces from an old boot, then satisfied with his inspection, he returned the gold-filled boot to its vault below.

In the meantime, Under-sheriff James Kinkead and a deputy had gone directly to the gravel quarry outside of Verdi and found the remains of the Wells Fargo treasure box. Aside from a few scattered coins that had spilled, none of the missing money could be found but Kinkead did find some tracks which led toward Sardine Valley. He followed them and arrived at the Tavern, captured Gilchrist and retrieved the boot-load of gold from its vault in the privy.

When asked where his companions were, Gilchrist explained that Parsons was hold up at Loyalton and Squires was at his brothers farm in Sierraville. Kinkead was a resolute man-hunter and by early morning he had both Parsons and Squires in custody.

The Birth of Sierra County

By Lee Adams

On September 9, 1850, California gained admittance to the United States as the thirty-first state and as such was comprised of twenty-seven counties. From that time of statehood through April 15, 1852, what is today Sierra County was a part of Yuba County, with the seat of county government in Marysville.

History relates "the disadvantages of belonging to Yuba County were early felt, Marysville was too distant, and a county government at that place was to the citizens here as useless as one in Kamtchatka. The trouble, expense, and time required to send criminals to Marysville were so great that many escaped the just punishment for their acts, while others were severely dealt with by "Judge Lynch." During this seven-teen month period, Downieville resident "Juanita" became the only woman lynched in California when she was hanged from a bridge spanning the Yuba River on July 5, 1851. It is suggested that the only county official that visited the isolated gold camps region of the large sprawling county on a regular basis was the tax collector.

A constantly increasing population rendered a separate county government, with a bill for segregation of Sierra County from Yuba County introduced in the legislature in the fall of 1851, and signed by Governor John Bigler on the sixteenth of April, 1852.

All was not settled with the Governor's signature in 1852. There were some minor adjustments to settle disputes between counties and clarify vague boundary definitions.

"The first change in boundary was made in 1856 when the Nevada line was shifted further north at the expense of Sierra County. ... In 1863 an attempt was made to define the boundaries more clearly, ... [and in doing so it] ... gave to Sierra a small strip of territory along its northern border."

The preceeding notes are from "California County Boundaries" by Owen C. Coy, 1923.

BIG NEWS FOR THE SUMMER CONCERT SERIES

With the help of the Sierra County Chamber of Commerce who organized "Friends of the Kentucky Mine Concerts", plans are completed for 10 performances. We owe a special thanks to all the members of this committee and especially to Doug Burr for all the work and planning they did to make these arrangements.

The concerts are on SATURDAY nights at 7:30 P.M. The "Value Pack" (10 tickets) is \$90.00; individual tickets purchased ahead are \$10.00; tickets at the door are \$12.00; ½ price for ages 7 to 17; age 6 and under are free. ANOTHER BIG ATTRACTION: A special dinner at the Museum will be available before each concert. Call (530) 862-1310 for details.

DATE	PERFORMANCE
July 3	KELLY FLEMING AND FRIENDS With NINA GERBER as lead guitar. Folk-Rock and Pop
July 10	UTAH PHILLIPS Original-Folk-Traditional
July 17	JODY STECHER & KATE BRESLIN Traditional Country-Folk
July 24	JAMEY BELLIZZI Celtic-Classical Guitar
July 31	SWING FEVER Jazz
August 7	MOUNTAIN LAURAL Bluegrass
August 14	CATFISH AND THE CRAWDADDIES Rhythm and Blues
August 21	GOLDEN BOUGH Celtic
August 28	SIKUS ANDEAN BAND Andes-Peruvian
September 4	DAVID MALONEY Original Folk and Humor Family oriented and a lively finale!



In Memoriam Margaret Copren Burelle

A teacher for 28 years in Sierra County schools, Margaret died January 10, 1999 in Tahoe Forest Hospital in Truckee, CA. She was born January 20, 1913 in Sierraville to Jennie Locke Church and William James Copren. Except for a few years in Inglewood, CA in the early 1940's, Margaret was a lifelong resident of Sierraville.

She was a graduate of U.C. Berkeley and had her first teaching assignment in Calpine, CA in the fall of 1937. She also taught in Forest where she said they were snowed in from Christmas to Easter. "I came out for Easter on a stage to Nevada City, caught a bus to Colfax, then took a train to Truckee where my parents met me with a car."

She then taught in Loyalton where "Mr. Allen turned the heat off at 11:00 A.M. and we froze until 2:00 P.M. when the heater came on with a vengeance and we removed all sweaters, coats, etc. I had a cold all year." Except for a few years off to be with her second son, Bob, she taught the rest of the time in Sierraville, retiring in 1974.

She was married to Gerald Burelle in 1942 and they had two sons, William of Sierraville and Robert of Alturas, CA who survive her as does her brother, W.E. Copren of Sierraville. There are two grandchildren – Josh of Sierraville and Lori Ball of Boise, ID.

Margaret was a member of Native Daughters of the Golden West, Holy Rosary Catholic Church and she was a charter member of the Sierra County Historical Society. After retirement and when her health permitted, she was a faithful volunteer at the Kentucky Mine Museum.