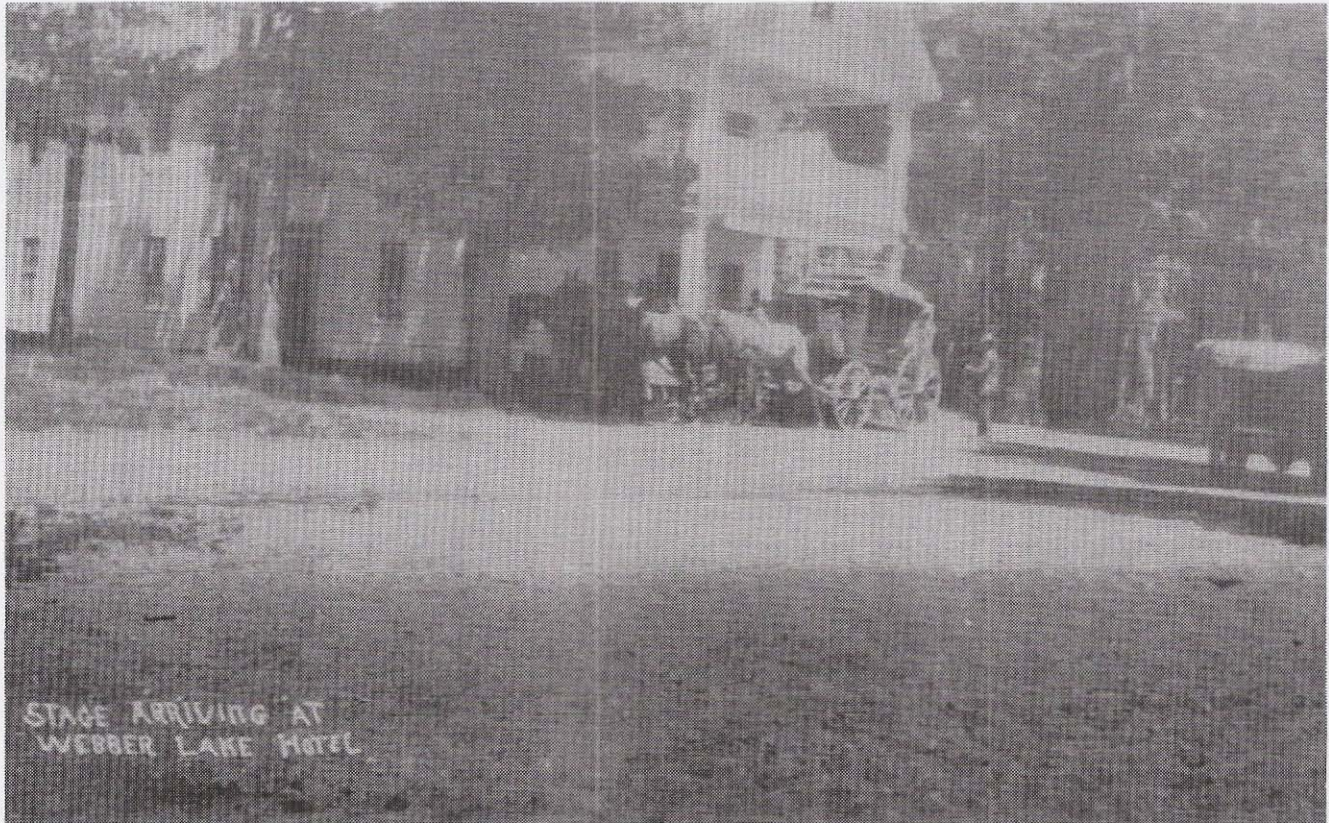


THE SIERRAN

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 2

Fall/Winter 1999



Webber Lake Hotel on the Henness Pass Route

From Gold to Silver, Sierra County's Henness Pass Route

By Lee Adams

"California drew to her golden shores the pick of the world. Nevada drew to herself the pick of California," so wrote Nevada journalist C. C. Goodwin in describing the difference between the California gold rush and Nevada's silver boom. It was the difference in demographics that allowed any number of avenues to be used by those rushing to California for gold, while some selective few routes were used and gained fame by those rushing from California into Nevada for silver. One of those routes, second only in use and fame to the Placerville Road, is Sierra County's Henness Pass Route.

While it was the 1859 rush to the Nevada Comstock that assured the route's survival into the following century, it was the California gold rush that founded the route's origin. Following the discovery of gold on the south fork of the American River in January of 1848, the resulting influx of miners overwhelmed an area with few developed roads.

[Please turn to page 3]

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!

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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
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Please send dues to the Membership Chair:

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SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Office Address: Kentucky Mine Museum
PO Box 260, Sierra City, CA 96125
(530) 862-1310 FAX: (530) 862-1312

SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP REPORT

We welcome these new members since our Spring edition of the *SIERRAN*.

Robert Burelle ----- Alturas, CA
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The following are BUSINESS and Supporting members for 1999.

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[Continued from page 2]

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 Kenneth & Barbara Van Gundy ----- Roseville, CA
 LEE D. WALKER D.D.S ----- Loyalton, CA
 John & Donna Walton ----- Concord, CA
 Michael & Betsy Webb ----- Pleasant Hill, CA
 Mrs. David White ----- Walnut Creek, CA
 Mrs. Lyman Wiltshire ----- Kenwood, CA
 Dr. & Mrs. Robert Winchell ----- Loyalton, CA

Sustaining Member

Evan & Joanne Dailey ----- San Francisco, CA

New LIFE Member

William Rowley ----- Verdi, NV

The Board appreciates the continued interest and support of ALL the members. They are what keep the Historical Society moving ahead. Our thanks to each of you.

[Continued from Page 1]

Henness Pass Route

Until the gold rush, the only inhabitants of the western slope and foothills of the Sierra were Native Americans and the occasional hunter and trapper. Early travel by miners into the gold laden canyons of the area occurred mostly by foot and pack animals. This was especially true in the northern mines area of Sierra County, an area higher and more rugged than the remainder of California's gold country, the Mother Lode.

Within months of the gold discovery, a significant number of towns developed in the northern mines area, with the most significant including North San Juan, Camptonville, Goodyear's Bar, and Downieville. Quite soon the foot trails between these budding communities, pushed by the increased need for freight, saw a transformation from primitive trails to a passable road. The Hennes Pass as well was an alternative to Donner Pass, as the route avoided many of the difficulties of that route, the greatest of which were granite and steep grades. For those headed westbound, they would leave the Truckee River near Verdi, and proceed west via the Hennes Pass and avoid the worst of the Donner route.

With its strategic location at the confluence of the Feather and Yuba Rivers, it was logical that Marysville would become both the principal supply point and place

of debarkation to the northern mines. Here too, primitive trails transformed into roads, much of the time developed and maintained by those living along the routes.

As miners flooded into the canyons of the western Sierra, the early 1850s saw a similar, yet smaller influx of ranchers and dairymen into the Sierra Valley, the Truckee basin, and Truckee Meadows of the eastern Sierra. With a sizable population to the west, these ranchers and dairymen first navigated early Sierra passes by foot, but demand required they be able to transport their commodities by wagon. It was this basic principal of supply, and demand that created the piece-by-piece development of the Hennes Pass route. From the closest year round harbor in the west, to the fertile food producing regions to the east, and gold fields in between, this was the scenario which created this route. Additional mineral deposits of silver found later to the east only extended and continued the need for the route.

As travel increased along the entire route, services necessary to this travel also increased. Wayside inns and stage stops were established and included those at Sleighville House, Negro Tent, Mountain House, Plum Valley, Our House, Cornish House, Miltons, Jackson Meadows, Webber's Hotel, Kyburz, Junction House, Sardine House, and First Summit. Still standing, Webber's Hotel on Truckee Lake (today, Webber Lake) was to become one of Sierra County's first recreational resorts as well as a working ranch. It was in many instances the proprietors of these establishments that improved a distance of road out of their own need, and together this loose assortment of independently maintained roads transformed into the Hennes Pass Route. Not until 1859 with the Marysville and Nevada City supported Hennes Pass Turnpike Company was the route improved as a long distance route. During the height of the Comstock rush, some 100 wagons a day used the route with traffic so heavy that it was proposed that freight be moved by day, and passenger stages run only at night.

With its easy grade and low level pass just to the west of Webber Lake, the Hennes Pass Route was early eyed by the Central Pacific Railroad as a choice for its trans-Sierra crossing. Chief design engineer Theodore Judah seriously considered the route due to its gentle grade and the absence of granite cliffs, yet the fact that the railroad was being built by four Sacramento merchants wishing to bypass Marysville and the promotion of Donner Pass by Dutch Flat merchants finally sold that route.

[continued on Page 4]

Henness Pass Route

[Continued from page 3]

Regardless of the railroad's decision, travel on the Hennes Pass Route continued. It remained the sole west-east route connecting the towns of Sierra County, while remaining as well a major regional route serving communities far outside of Sierra County's borders. Not until the completion of the Yuba Pass road in 1870 were there any good alternatives for the moving of freight between western and eastern Sierra County. The following report, from a November 1888 issue of *The Mountain Messenger*, was indicative of reports of the time, and showed the continuing use of the road as a primary travel route into the region:

On Tuesday afternoon a bold attempt was made to rob the stage running between Forest City and Mountain House. The stage was driven by Thomas Davis, and Ben Treloar was a passenger. Going up the grade from Lucky Dog Ravine a call came from a man hiding in the brush above the road, for the stage to halt. Before the stage could be brought to a stop a shot was fired which cut the left hand of Davis and shattered the knee of Treloar. The horses started to run at the shot, and it being uphill, the driver was unable to control them. After proceeding a short distance they met Dave Sheehan who got the stage and drove the team to the Mountain House. David and Treloar were brought to Downieville where Dr. Jump found it necessary to amputate Treloar's leg and the thumb of Davis.

County Sheriff Stewart and Constable Hartling left immediately upon receipt of the news of the attempted robbery and shooting. The investigation revealed that the highwayman had crossed the road and gone down into Oregon Creek gulch. It appeared clear that the intention of the robber was to get gold that had been shipped by the Bald Mountain Extension Mine.

It was the upgrading of the Yuba Pass Road, and a decline in mining near the turn of the century that finally doomed the Hennes Pass Route as Sierra County's premier west-east road. While still continuing to be used by mining, logging, and recreationists, its days as a major trading artery were over.

Today, the Hennes Pass Route remains. Always a route rather than a single road, it has been referred to as a bifurcated pass. Begun as a series of independent roads, in some instances these roads served travel between the same points. As conditions changed on a

certain road, it may or may not have been used by through traffic. Along the route all roads shared the distinction that they were able to serve long distance traffic over the Hennes Pass, that summit of the Sierra crest west of Webber Lake.

What remains unclear to this date and clouded in some controversy is the person who lent their name to the pass and route, although most believe the name is that of Patrick Hennes, an early rancher in the Jackson Meadows area. It is believed he discovered the pass in 1852.

A recently published brochure, and posted signs along the route, self-guides visitors on a historic driving tour of the route. Entitled "From Gold to Silver, the Comstock Connection," the tour gives a history of the road and describes twenty-two sites from the Oregon Creek covered bridge near its confluence with the Middle Yuba River, to Summit One, three miles west of Verdi and the California/Nevada state line. As some sections are unimproved, a high clearance vehicle is mandatory, and a four-wheel drive vehicle recommended. There is no fuel availability along the route.

What remains in place is a road traveled by few, unrivaled for beauty, and one that retains its distinction both as a gentle crossing of the Sierra and the shortest mileage route between Marysville and Virginia City.

For more information:

The Bonanza West - The Story of Western Mining Rushes, 1848-1900, by William S. Greener

History of the Sierra Nevada, by Francis P. Farquhar

Historic Spots in California, by Hoover and Rensch

Hennes Pass/Zumwalt Pass/Route, by E. Clampus Vitas

California Place Names, by Erwin Gudde

From Gold to Silver, the Comstock Connection,

by USDA Forest Service, et al.

Alleghany and Forest City, Treasure Towns, by James J. Sinnott

Sierra Valley, Jewel of the Sierras, by James I. Sinnott

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.

Being Raised in Alleghany

By Kathi McGuire

My family and I moved to Alleghany in 1948 when I was only two years old. My father, Mike DeGrio, worked for Mrs. Dickey who was running the Oriental Mine. Her son, Donald was touring and racing in Europe at that time.

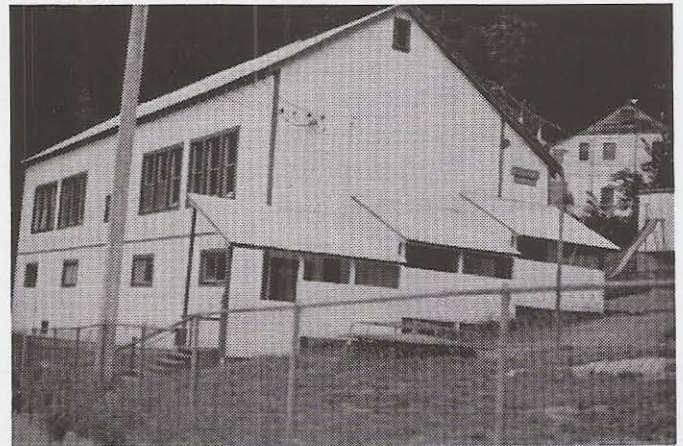
We lived in a very nice two-story house at the mine until we were flooded out in 1950. My brother, Bud and sisters, Mickey and Patty were as excited as I was to be moving into town. We bought a home across from the Alleghany store (owned by Joe Sbaffi) and started making new friends by knocking on every door in town to see if any children could play with us. My brother, sisters and I knew everyone in town before a week had gone by. You see, there were only about 275 people who lived in Alleghany at this time. That was one of the joys about being raised in a small town as Alleghany. Everyone knew each other. We all became one "big family", always being there for one another.

The main mines working with crews in the fifties and sixties were, the El Dorado, Plumbago, Gold Crown, Kate Hardy, Kenton, Oriental, Sixteen to One, and the Ruby mine; to name a few. The town seemed alive even though gold was thirty-five dollars an ounce and the miners' pay was poor. I will always remember, at four o'clock, the big whistle at the Sixteen to One mine would blow (to let the miners know another hard day of mucking and drilling was over) and some of us kids would run down the road to meet our fathers and would fight over which one of us would be lucky enough to carry his lunch bucket or be the first to jump on the running board of Tom Hogan's model A Ford.

Alleghany consisted of a general store with post office, two saloons, (The Golden Eagle and Casey's) a small Catholic church nestled behind the plaza, Mrs. Swan's Boarding house and a two-story schoolhouse with a gym (community hall). The Golden Eagle had a cafe and hotel. Casey's also had a soda parlor (opposite the bar) where we would all gather after watching a movie (black and white, of course) being shown by Mr. Ping Hunley in the hall. The hall (gym) was also where we held our high school basketball games (if we were lucky to have five boys on the team) and Christmas plays. There were about 70 to 75 students that made up 1-12 grades. We had four teachers, one being the principle. Our classrooms were small with wood desks until in the

early 60's, they were replaced with new metal desks and chairs! We were so proud of them

Alleghany was full of excitement and adventure! There were carnivals, street dances, picnics at Plum Valley, school plays and snow toboggan get togethers. We celebrated our school proms together with Downieville High and spent our summers hiking three miles to swim at "Big Hole", Oregon Creek and Foots Crossing. There were teenager dances at Sierra City and Downieville once a week; we dated students from both towns and still keep in touch with a few.



Alleghany School, 1980 (Burned in 1982)

One of my most impressive memories as a child in Alleghany was when we students put on our Christmas play for the township. Mrs. Ping Hunley would purchase gifts (for the Sixteen to One Mine) and See's candy to be given to each student by Santa (who was usually our deputy, Bob Morris). The widows were not forgotten either, for they received a box of candy also.

This event happened every year until the mine closed in 1965 (the year I graduated). To this day, I can't recall when I have experienced feeling so very special by the unselfishness of a person and/or act.

Holidays were always meaningful in our home too. My parents made sure there was at least one miner (that did not have family) setting at our dinner table. We kids sure enjoyed listening to the stories each miner had stored away in their memories (of a hard life lived, still waiting to find the "big" nugget). How I wish I could have recorded the history they were telling us children then. Those miners have all passed away now, including my own father and mother.

[continued on Page 6]

Being Raised in Alleghany

[continued from page 5]

Halloween was another fun time. That's when children could eat all the homemade goodies. We never hesitated to walk all the way down to the Sixteen to One mine (in the pitch dark) to trick or treat at John Fontana's (a Swede who was so very kind to all of us goblins). He always chewed tobacco and it stuck in between his teeth, which showed whenever he smiled or laughed. John even bought one of his favorite little girls, Mary Howard, her first communion dress with shoes to match!! I remember thinking, what a lucky girl to have such a beautiful dress. It almost made me want to be Catholic. The trips to the graveyard were always thrillers on Halloween night! Steve Hart was our "Steven King"; grabbing at our legs as we passed the tombstone he was crouching behind. Talk about having a heart attack! I don't ever remember being so scared or hearing such blood curdling screams!! My heart never pounded so fast!!! I believe Ole Mae West (the haggard, white, swayed-back mule that had worked in the mine for the Sixteen to One) would have taken off with a gallop!!!!

My family moved again (used to be the three story hospital that Doc. Hardy practiced in). Our home sat across from the fire bell on the lower road. We kids thought, finally, Dad's mine (EL Dorado) hit the big one!!! We had five bedrooms and a full basement with an oil furnace (Alpha Hardware sold and filled the oil tanks used in Alleghany). Several homes were heated with woodstoves in the winter. Our winters could be long with lots of snow still melting clear into early springtime. I do remember in 1952 people had to make tunnels from semi-plowed streets to their doorways!! One could see only stovepipes above the twenty-three feet of snow that fell that winter. Several of us ran out of oil, wood and food so we moved in with other families until the roads could be plowed by the county men; the snowplows ran twenty-four hours a day! I thought we would all die before the snow melted; phone lines were down, snow equipment kept breaking down and our homes seemed so dark (during the day too) because the windows were covered over with snow!!!! Not a pleasant winter by all means!!

I learned to drive at the young age of twelve (as most of the kids did). Back then, we drove on dirt roads shared with logging trucks! If that wasn't scary! When you were approaching a blind curve, you had better sound your car horn or you probably wouldn't live to tell who was driving the logging truck! I felt, at times, like the whites of my eyes were the only thing showing on my face due to the heavy dust that flew in the car before I could get

the car window rolled up. We drove to Grass Valley at least once a week and my sister, Patty and I always got car sick! Pat was the oldest so she could ride up front with our folks and sit by a window. We fought over who was going to sit by the windows in the back seat so my dad usually settled the arguments real fast!

Thanks to my father (he was a supervisor in Sierra County as well as being a foreman/miner) Alleghany finally had paved roads. He fought hard for Alleghany to get its share of improvements. It was the smallest district in the county. I do believe he was the hottest member on the Board of Supervisors and being Italian didn't help to keep his temper down when he wanted to be heard. A lot of people are still living who probably remember my father, Mike (Roland) DeGrio and my loving mother, Margaret. She died at the age of forty-three (from ovarian cancer). I was a senior in 1965 when mother passed away. She was too young and we still needed and loved her very much. What a shining star she was in the lives of many people.

I left Alleghany three weeks after I graduated to continue cosmetology college in Sacramento. I live in Orangevale, Cal. and have been designing hair for over thirty years.

I shall always be thankful and proud of my heritage and roots, for they are STRONGER, RICHER and more UNIQUE than those of most people; for I had the wonderful opportunity to be raised in Alleghany, Cal. around some of the world's most loving, caring and giving people anyone could meet.

You can take the girl out of the mountains but you can't take the mountains out of the girl. That's where *my* heart still lingers to live again!

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

OUR ANNUAL MEETING WILL BE ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 19 AT 12:30 P.M. AT WEBBER LAKE. THIS IS AN HISTORIC AND SCENIC AREA WHICH LEE ADAMS, THE PROGRAM SPEAKER, WILL TALK ABOUT (including the solving of an old mystery!) EVERYONE BRING THEIR OWN LUNCH--EAT INSIDE AT THE TABLES, THANKS TO DOUG GARTNER, OR OUTSIDE. ICE-COLD LEMONADE WILL BE AVAILABLE. THERE WILL BE AN ELECTION OF BOARD MEMBERS. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR DIRECTIONS, CALL 994-3480 OR 862-1310.

Alleghany Remembered

By W.D. Hardie

From SIERRA HERITAGE, July-August, 1991

When gold was king, the High Sierra mining town of Alleghany, CA, was the vibrant jewel in the crown. Clinging tenaciously to the side of a Pliocene ridge, the town still conveys the quiet loneliness of another era.

Springing from a streambed mining camp in 1851, Alleghany grew to become the most prolific continuous producer of gold in the United States, a town with but one occupation--mining gold.

walk of life. The women they brought with them, or went back home for, were as proud, tough, and resilient as their men.

The name Alleghany came into being when a group of miners from Allegheny, PA working a drift mine, named the town, replacing the "eny" with an "any." Why? No one ever knew.

The character and quality of a mining town is determined by its inhabitants, and the wide diversity of those who lived in and passed through Alleghany left their mark on it. Harold Casey, for instance, a welterweight fighter from Butte, Montana, arrived in



The Original Sixteen To One Mine

The high ridge road to Alleghany leaves Highway 49 some 18 miles north of Nevada City. The new asphalt road parallels the old dirt road. The old road, now little more than a large rut, descends through the smooth worn rocks of ancient tertiary bedrock. Finally, at the bottom, the first houses appear, evoking memories of another time--a time of life and richness.

From Alleghany's beginning in 1851, when a crew of Hawaiian sailors jumped ship in San Francisco and found their way to the creek below town, she started producing gold. The Kanakas, as the Hawaiians called themselves, gave their name to the creek that produces gold to this day.

As creek placer mining gave way to lode tunnel mining, a new breed of miner emerged--the hard-rock miner--tough, resilient, proud, and independent. These men came from a dozen different countries and every

Alleghany and opened a saloon, simply called "Casey's Place". He went on to become the unofficial mayor and a benefactor to any who were down and out. Law and order in a mining town is sometimes hard to come by, and on more than one occasion, when diplomacy failed, Casey fell back on settling disputes with his fists.

Jimmy Sweeney, born in Brooklyn, New York, had been a sailor, tramp, and philosopher before turning to mining. In his last years, when he could no longer mine, he became not only the town barber, but also the town oracle. A miner named Mr. Hunt, later owner of Hunt Foods, once asked Sweeney what work he thought he should do. Squinting his eyes, and thinking hard, Sweeney advised Hunt to get out of mining and into another line of work. Who's to say the advice didn't change Hunt's life.

[continued on Page 8]

[continued from page 7]

Larry "By God" Niles started and ended every sentence with the words "by God". If asked, "How are you, Larry?" Held responded, "I'm just fine, by God!" or "By God, I'm just fine".

In 1896 Thomas Bradbury discovered a major mine in his backyard, a mine that was a maker of millionaires. The "Sixteen to One" named for one of the planks in William Jennings Bryan's presidential platform: "Hard money should be sixteen parts silver and one part gold."

H.L. Johnson, a former school teacher from Ohio took a lease on a mine called the "Tightner" in 1903. With his first blast of dynamite, he recovered \$120, and, finally, more than \$470,000 was taken from that one body of ore—when gold was only \$20 an ounce. After building the biggest and finest house in town., Johnson sold the claim for \$500,000 and moved to Berkeley, CA. But his discovery spurred the town to a new high that lasted 60 years. In those early days the miners were paid in gold coins, and it was not uncommon to see them lobbing gold coins into a crack in the sidewalk—winner take all.

Other colorfully named mines produced great amounts of gold: Brush Creek, Kate Hardy, Twenty-One, Gold Canyon, Ireland, El Dorado, Oriental, Plumbago, Yellow Jacket—to name just a few. All the mines worked at least one shift of miners; most worked two or three.

The town swelled with hotels and boarding houses, rooming houses and saloons, private homes and mine bunkhouses.

Albert Hohnes owned a mine called the "Minnie D", part of which ran right into town. He donated that part toward the building of a church.

The town continued to grow. A new school appeared, along with a Masonic Hall, a community building, a dairy, and a livery stable. The establishment of a horse-drawn stage put Alleghany only two days from Nevada City.

The last doctor to live in Alleghany, Dr. Hardie, arrived in the early 1920's and built a two-story home and a hospital. "Doc" Hardie stayed until World War II shut down mining almost completely.

By Order No. 208 of the War Production Board, mining was run on a limited basis. The "Sixteen to One", which had been working 90 to 100 men, cut its manpower to only 20. Only 200 tons of ore could be mined for each six-month period, eliminating most of the mining in the country. Up to and through 1968, Alleghany produced over \$50 million worth of gold at prevailing prices, most of that when the price of gold was \$20 an ounce.

The old miner and the old ways are now a thing of the past. Pneumatic drills have replaced the work of a double jack. Mucking machines took the place of shovels. Fourth of July parades, complete with marching brass bands and elegantly dressed young ladies riding sidesaddle, once passed along streets where now a lazy dog lies motionless in the road. The boardwalks that once lined both sides of the street are gone or decaying.

The town burned in 1932, but was quickly rebuilt. Since then, half a dozen fires have taken the buildings one by one. Now no one rebuilds. Evidence of the last fire, in 1988, is everywhere

Too little shows of what Alleghany was, and too much shows of what she is—an old lady, bent and haggard, but still hanging on. And still producing gold, by God!

FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD

This has been another successful year with the grateful help of "Friends of Kentucky Mine". The committee worked very hard and put in a lot of time making all the concert arrangements and in refurbishing the stage at the amphitheatre. WE THANK YOU—Mike and Lila Heuer, Doug and Suzanne Burr, Bill and Norma Reece. Ken and Carol Newcombe, Elwood and Della Brooks.

LIVING HISTORY DAY was a huge success, under the able direction of Lois Keeler and her committee. Over a thousand were in attendance with a continual crowd beginning at 10:00 A.M. for this FREE day at the Museum. There were numerous exhibits; tours of the stamp mill; the new lights in the 85' tunnel were fantastic; the brass band gave two concerts playing Civil War music and were in uniforms to fit the occasion; a three-piece band provided music for the enjoyment of all; the Downieville Lions Club served hot dogs and cold drinks, if you were lucky you might have gotten some of their free homemade ice cream. The day ended with an excellent tri-tip dinner put on by the Lions Club, followed by the concert in the amphitheatre. It was a enjoyable day of history, music and visiting. Thank you Lois, Barbara Martinetti, Wanda Longsine, Rita Bradley, LaVerne Monico and Lee Adams. We are already planning for a repeat in the year 2000!