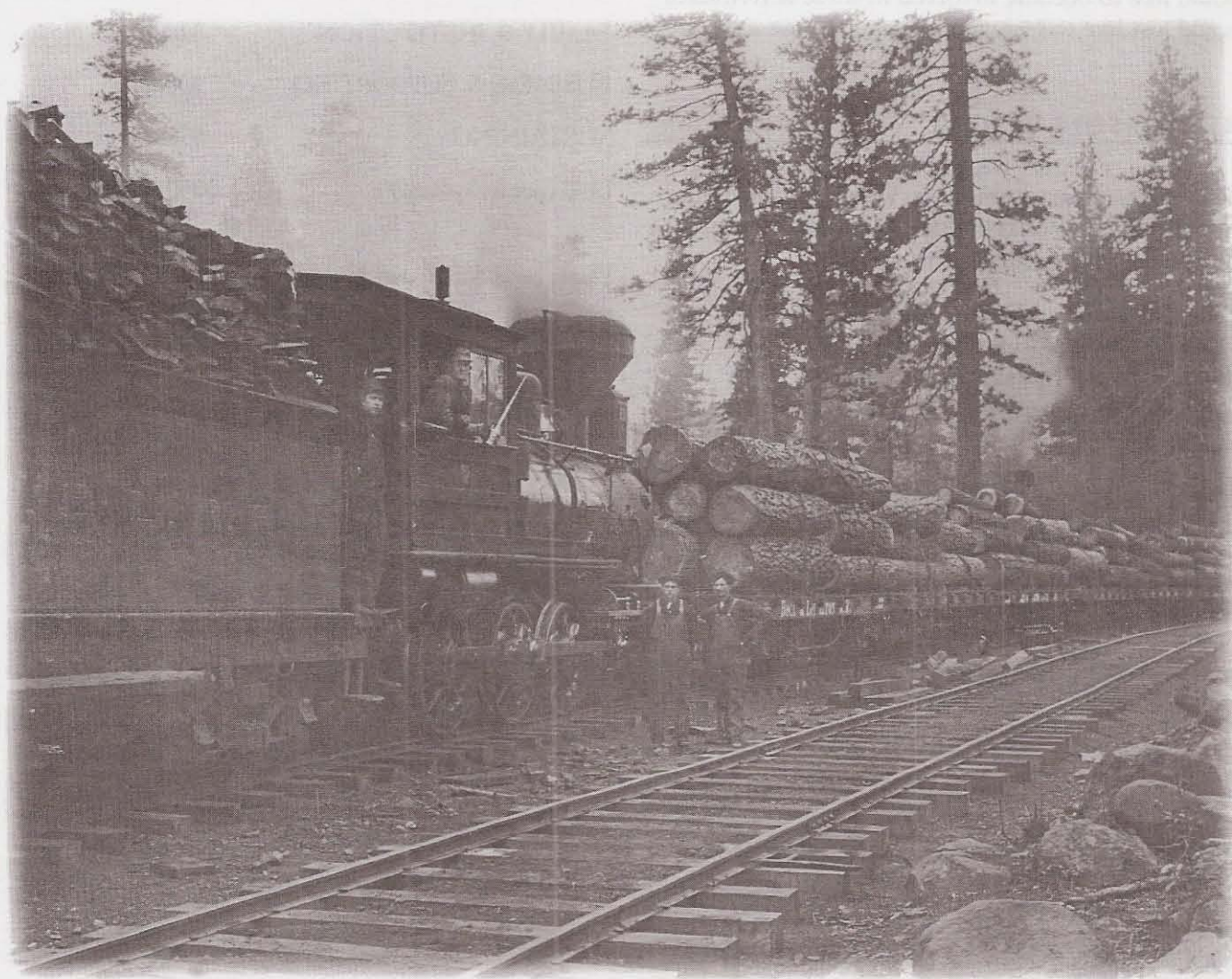


The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —

MEMBER OF THE CONFERENCE OF CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETIES
AND THE CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS



The Boca and Loyalton Railroad, Sierra County's Only Rail Line.

As part of Loyalton's Centennial celebration in 2001, Sierra County Sheriff Lee Adams conducted a very interesting jeep trip from Loyalton — south up Smithneck Canyon to the summit and then down to Boca — the route of the Boca and Loyalton rail line. Sheriff Adams prepared the following history of the B. and L. as part of his historical trip. ~

— THE 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 an annual meeting, publishes a semi-annual newsletter and conducts historical research. Members are sent notices of Society activities, receive THE SIERRAN, and are admitted free of charge to the museum and stamp mill tour. If you would like to become involved in these activities or would just like to give your support, please join us!

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

We welcome these new members who have joined since the Fall 2002 issue of THE SIERRAN. We appreciate the interest and support of all our members.

Muriel Meskauskas – Fairfield, CA
Dale & Louise Cox – Olympic Valley, CA
Marley Padgett – Fairfax, CA
Tom & Marilyn Fitzmyers – Sierraville, CA
Terin Schmitz – Novato, CA

We welcome two new LIFE members and appreciate their interest and support.

Ray and Delanna Schneider – Novato, CA
Tom Dolley – Sierraville, CA

2003 OFFICERS, DIRECTORS & STAFF

President Bill Long
Vice President Bill Copren
Treasurer Milton Gottardi
Secretary Maren Scholberg
Membership Chair Lynn McKechnie
Directors Bud Buczkowske, Virginia Lutes,
Susan Schoensee, Rita Bradley, Milton Gottardi
Museum Director Anne Eldred
THE SIERRAN Editor Judy Lawrence

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	\$15.00
FAMILY & INSTITUTION	\$20.00
BUSINESS & SUPPORTING	\$30.00
SUSTAINING	\$50.00
LIFE (per individual)	\$250.00

Please send dues to the Membership Chair:

Lynn McKechnie
PO Box 294
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

The Need for a Railroad

With the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, much of the area along its path was changed forever. Such was especially true of the Truckee River drainage. One of many demands on this area was that of a need for lumber, and the result was birth of the timber industry in the surrounding areas. By the mid 1880s, brothers W.S., Horace, and Richard Lewis, along with the Peck Brothers, located a lumber mill within Smithneck Canyon, 17 miles north of the Central Pacific Railroad right of way, north of Boca. Located in Sierra County, the mill was originally founded by the two Peck brothers. By 1888, a former Sacramento River steamboat captain by the name of John H. Roberts joined the effort as the Lewis Brothers' sole partner. With Roberts as a partner, steam wagons, also known as traction engines, were used. Previously used by Roberts in his steamboat ventures, the machines were utilized to transport lumber to and from the mill at Lewis Mill and a second mill operated by the Lewis Brothers at Verdi.

By 1900, the partners had tired of the traction engines. To alleviate the concerns of nearby ranchers, the machines were used only at night so as not to scare horse drawn wagons utilizing the same roadways by day. The railroad was viewed as an option to replace the steam wagons, with the promise that such a system would provide for both greater efficiency and speed.

Incorporated on September 25, 1900, construction of the line commenced from the Boca town site and proceeded north toward Loyalton. While grading began

in September, the first rails were laid in January 1901. By March 1901 the railroad reached the seventeen miles to Lewis Mill, and by July 1901 the railroad was completed the additional nine miles to Loyalton. By the year's end, rails would continue to the town of Mormon (today known as Portola). At 45.20 miles, this would be the Boca and Loyalton Railroad's completed operational route.

The completion of the railroad, the first into the Sierra Valley, brought a building boom to the newly incorporated City of Loyalton. Dating to before the Civil War, the community incorporated on Admission Day, September 9, 1901. Within a year, seven lumber mills and box factories were operating within the city, all taking advantage of the prolonged drying season within the arid Sierra Valley. In addition to the movement of timber and lumber products between Portola and Boca and points in between, the railroad also provided daily passenger service along the length of its route, in addition to contracts with the US Postal Service for mail delivery and with Wells Fargo and Company for express services. The railroad also transported ice harvested along its route. Meeting the Central Pacific rails at Boca, the railroad was both a passenger and freight link to and from the Sierra Valley.

Still standing is the original B&L Passenger Station. While turned 180 degrees, it is today the City of Loyalton Maintenance building. ~



From this point, the railroad headed both north along its present alignment to Portola, and south up Smithneck Canyon. On the site of the present SPI Mill, a number of sidings serviced no fewer than six mills in the immediate area. To continue to follow the only route, today we will proceed north on State Route 49 and then south on County Road 270. As you pass the Sierra Brooks subdivision, the rail grade will become visible on the hillside across Smithneck Creek. The grade follows this route approximately four miles to Alder Creek. Along the way, we will also pass the site of the California Mill. At Alder Creek, we will stop to explore the old rail grade. ~

ALDER CREEK STOP

Heyday of a Railroad

By 1908, the Boca and Loyalton Railroad boasted 133 employees and operated 7 steam locomotives, 2 combination freight and passenger cars, one boxcar, 44 flat cars, and a single caboose. In addition to the 45 miles of main line from Boca to Portola, the railroad operated 11 miles of branches and spurs that reached into prime lumber growth areas. In addition to the Lewis Mill near Sardine Valley and the mills operating in the Sierra Valley, at least three other mills operated along its route between Boca and Loyalton.

As we continue up the grade, the railroad is believed to have crossed onto the east side of Smithneck Creek at Alder Creek and the rail grade seems to be visible just to the right of the Smithneck Road in some places. We will soon come onto the old Lewis Mill site, where a large pile of sawdust remains. This was the Mill founded by the Lewis Brothers, a name very important in both the founding of the B&LRR and the City of Loyalton. This will be a stop as well today. ~

LEWIS MILL STOP

In addition to the sawdust pile, remains of the mill are seen throughout this area. The main mill complex is thought to have been in the area where the creek bends left as it heads down the canyon, and employee housing was to the east of the Smithneck Road. Lumber drying racks were on the hillside to the west of Smithneck Creek. Some evidence of the B&L grade is visible as the line follows the creek on its way up the grade through the Lewis Mill site.

As we continue to head south, evidence of the rail grade will be very visible as we enter Pat's Meadow. At this point the grade crosses from the west to the right side of the road, and follows the hillside contour to the left of the road. Some evidence of rock work retaining walls are visible as well. As we crest the summit, we will continue on today's Jammer Chair Road. The road is the original grade of the railroad for the next few miles. As we enter this road, there will be another stop to view the grade as it crests the summit. For approximately the last mile before the summit, long stretches of the grade exists with ties still in place. ~

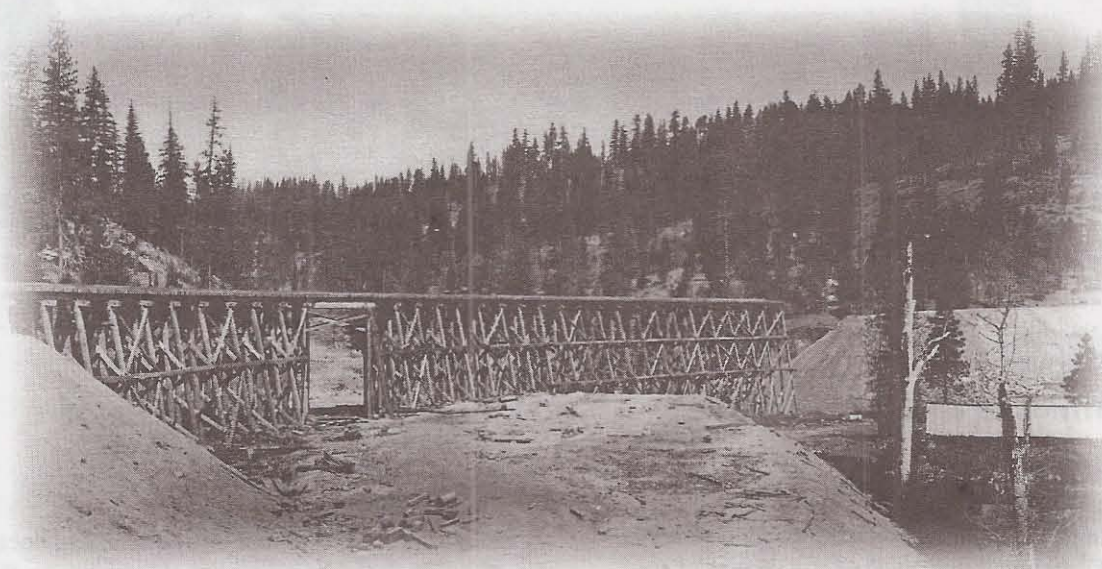
SUMMIT STOP

The Route of the Boca and Loyalton Railroad

Beginning at Boca and an elevation of 5,534 feet, the railroad crested a summit west of the Sardine Valley before descending Smithneck Canyon and Creek into Loyalton at an elevation of 4,950 feet. With railroad engines finding difficulty operating at grades exceeding 4% (four feet elevation gain for every hundred feet in

LOCOMOTIVES OF THE B&L RAILROAD

#	Type	Builder	#	Date	Weight	Purchased From	Disposal
1	0-4-4T	Baldwin		1892	52,000	Chicago South Side Elevated RR	Scrapped 1937
2	4-4-0	Baldwin		1875	60,000	Pennsylvania RR	Unknown
3	2-6-0	Baldwin	3889	1876	75,000	Virginia and Truckee RR	Scrapped 1916
4	2-6-0	Baldwin	3891	1876	76,000	Verdi Lumber Company	Scrapped 1930
5	2-8-0	Baldwin	6085	1882	108,000	Southern Railway	Scrapped 1949
6	4-6-0	Rhode Island		1875	96,000	Unknown	Unknown
7	4-6-0	Pittsburgh	978	1888	101,000	Pittsburgh & Lake Erie RR	Scrapped 1934



distance), this route was laid out with no grade exceeding 3%. With the turning ability of railroads limited as well, along this route no turn exceeded 18 degrees. In order to build within such limitations in mountain geography, the result was a railroad encompassing seventy-seven wooden trestles totaling 2,710 feet, with the longest single trestle running 180 feet in length. A single bridge was constructed, 120 feet in length. Our next stop will be the site of the remains of one such trestle. ~

TRESTLE STOP

As we continue on, the road appears to very closely follow the rail right of way, either the road being on the grade or the grade being just to our right. As we break into Sardine Valley, one can notice a number of grades appearing from both sides and crossing the B&L grade. At this point, both the Verdi Lumber Company Railroad (a standard gauge RR) and the Hobart Estate Railroad (a Narrow Gauge RR), crossed the B&L tracks.

Also begun in 1901, by 1905 the Verdi Lumber Company Railroad began building west of Dog Valley and crossed the Boca and Loyalton tracks at Sardine Valley. That route continued to Bear Valley and a few miles short of Sierraville. Later yet, the narrow gauge railroad operated by the Hobart Estate Company of Truckee crossed B&L tracks heading west to as far as Independence Lake.

What's the difference between standard and narrow gauge?

The building of the transcontinental Railroad by two competing companies, the Central Pacific of California and the Union Pacific from Omaha, required that each company build in a uniform manner with respect to the

size of rail and the distance between rails. With the U.S. Government heavily subsidizing the project, it was left to President Lincoln to set such a standard. At that time, 56 1/2" or 4 foot 8 1/2 inches, was proclaimed to be standard gauge rail and it remains to this date. There were numerous smaller railroads operating in the United States utilizing a gauge commonly set at 36" or three feet. ~

CAMP 21 STOP

Continuing on, the railroad crossed the venerable Henness Pass Road at today's Davies Creek Campground. This route, founded as early as the 1850s, was named for Patrick Henness, a rancher who settled in the Jackson Meadows area ten miles west of here. An early emigrant route, it provided a popular passage from Marysville, CA to Virginia City, NV during the height of the Comstock rush.

"Ascending westward for four miles, we reached the first summit, here covered with a dense pine forest. Two miles further on we came to the forks of the Henness and old Nevada Roads."

— John A. Brewster, California State Surveyor General, August 1856.

At this site, the railroad also followed Davies Creek to its confluence with the Little Truckee in the Stampede Valley. Walking downstream, one can still identify the rail bed disappearing into Stampede Reservoir, a US Bureau of Reclamation project that inundated the Stampede Valley in 1970. ~



DAVIES CREEK STOP

The Demise of the Boca and Loyalton Railroad

With only two profitable years during its 16-year life, a number of different issues marked the demise of the B&LRR. Aggressive logging in the area greatly reduced the availability of timber in the area. By 1909, with the assistance of the B&L, the Western Pacific Railroad was completed into the Sierra Valley and now competed with the B&L for limited freight commerce. As early as 1905, the WP's parent company, the Denver and Rio Grand began purchasing interests in the B&L, and by 1912 had purchased a 51% controlling share of B&L stock. Forced into receivership in 1915, the B&L was sold by foreclosure in 1916. The route from Boca to Loyalton was abandoned and the rails ultimately removed, and the Western Pacific Railroad purchased the remainder of the line from Loyalton to Portola. The Union Pacific Railroad that continues to operate these tracks today, purchased the Western Pacific.

Our next stop will be at the Sierra/Nevada County line, just up stream from the Boyington Mill that operated in the 1880s. Following the Little Truckee River downstream, the grade continues to be visible today at this spot. Walking the grade, one can continue to see rail ties in place. ~



Modern day B. and L. ties from old railroad bed.

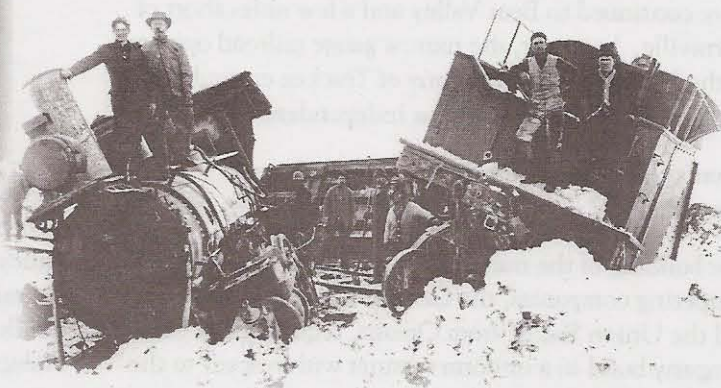
COUNTY LINE STOP

Namesake Towns: A Tale of Two Cities

A railroad born of the lumber industry, the Boca and Loyalton Railroad was the idea of lumbermen W.S. Lewis and John H. Roberts. They operated a mill seventeen miles west of this site in Smithneck Canyon, first served by steam wagons. By 1901, the two decided that a railroad would better serve their needs. Incorporated September 25, 1900, construction completed the seventeen miles to Lewis Mill by March 1901, and the tracks arrived the additional nine miles to Loyalton by July 4, 1901. Further expansion completed the railroad to Portola by the end of that year.

BOCA Spanish for mouth, the town was named for the nearby mouth of the Little Truckee River and developed soon after the arrival of the Central Pacific Railroad in 1868. A company town founded by the Central Pacific Railroad, it remained an industrial center, its name soon adorned a brewery, an ice industry, and finally a railroad. Like its namesake railroad, the town was not to survive.

LOYALTON Founded in the 1850's as Smith's Neck, the community with Union sympathies changed its name to show that support during the Civil War. With the completion of the B&LRR in 1901, the town incorporated later that year with the support of the Lewis



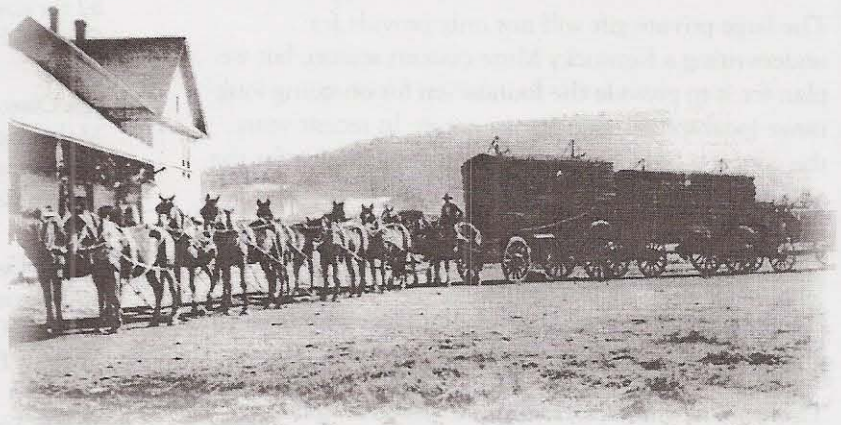
family, a partner in the railroad and a prominent area lumberman. To support the lumber industry, the city was incorporated. Along with incorporation came the ability to outlaw certain activities seen as detrimental to the lumber industry work force – gambling, prostitution, and alcohol. For that reason, city limits were pushed deep into the surrounding forested areas, making Loyalton one of the largest city, in area, within California (some 50 square miles) until the lines were finally redrawn in the 1930s to the modest one-or-less square mile city limits of today. Founded as a farming community and its economy boosted by a century of lumbering, it has survived as the largest and only incorporated city within Sierra County. It is not by coincidence that both the city and the railroad commemorate their centennials this year. ~

BOCA TOWNSITE STOP

We hope that you have enjoyed today's tour. The following individuals and entities have been diligently working to create nine interpretive displays that will guide future visitors to the tour that you have experienced today. Those displays will show some of the photos and documents that are a part of this packet, as well as many more. A cooperative effort of the Sierra County Historical Society and the US Forest Service, it will be due to the efforts of the following entities and individuals:

- * US Forest Service
- * Sierra County Historical Society
- * Nevada State Museum
- * California State Railroad Museum

- * Plumas County Museum
- * California State Archives
- * Loyalton Museum
- * Bill Long, Calpine
- * Anne Eldred, Sierraville
- * Deborah Walker, USFS
- * Michael Baldrice, USFS
- * Susan Haren, Sierraville
- * Milt Gottardi, Loyalton
- * Alvin Lombardi, Loyalton
- * Adella Lombardi, Loyalton
- * Bud Keahey, Calpine
- * Ryan Grandi, Sierraville
- * Lee Adams, Downieville



Boca and Loyalton Depot, "Last load" from Sunset Lumber Company, circa 1912.



The Sierran

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THE SIERRAN

SPRING/SUMMER 2003

Message from President Bill Long

Not missed among the bright spring colors facing the SCHS Board of Directors this spring is the budgetary red ink usually found in our projected budgets. A very large unsolicited donation, plus a first-time ever operating appropriation from the Sierra County Board of Supervisors puts smiles on your director's faces.

The large private gift will not only provide for underwriting a Kentucky Mine concert season, but we plan for it to provide the foundation for on-going long-range local sponsorship for the series. In recent years the concerts have become an increasing burden for the society.

On the preservation front there is also good news. The 1880's Loganville cabin called the Lagomarsino-Keirn Home has been rescued from the bulldozers and is coming under the society's wing.

There are new Directors with energetic new plans to introduce. That good news will follow in future *Sierrans*.

A Shelf of Histories

- * *Sierra County / Sierra Valley Barn Book* has been reprinted. \$17 includes tax and postage. Orders payable to: Sierra County Historical Society, Box 141, Sierraville, CA 96126
- * *The Historical Homes of Sierra Valley in Sierra County*, by Maren Scholberg is available for \$17 (includes tax. Add \$2 for postage.) Orders payable to: Sierra County Historical Society, Box 141, Sierraville, CA 96126
- * Jim Olsen's popular memoir, *The Camps of Clover Valley*. Make checks for \$19 (includes tax and postage), payable to the Sierra County Historical Society, Box 141, Sierraville, CA 96126
- * *Sierra County Pioneer Cemetery Historic Survey* (to 1925) compiled by Lee Adams in 1997. \$22 (only a few copies left). Order from the Sierra County Historical Society, Box 141, Sierraville, CA 96126
- * *Voices Still Echo in the Canyon* and *Whispers on the Wind* by Bud Buczkowske, recounting the history of Alleghany and some stories from the Goodyears Creek/Canyon Creek band of the county, respectively, replete with photos. \$22 includes tax and postage. The books may be ordered directly from Bud at Box 904, Alleghany, CA 95910
- * *Haskell Creek Summer Home Tract History* has been donated to the Sierra County Historical Society for the library in the Kentucky Mine Museum. We appreciate the donation and thank Jean Myles for arranging this donation. A limited number of books – 678 pages – are available at \$65.00 which includes postage. email: Westwind3233@yahoo.com