

The Sierran

◀ A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society ▶

KENTUCKY MINE TRESTLE RESTORATION

By Mary Nourse



Trestle Work, April, 1976.

SCHS Photo



Trestle Work, April, 1976.

SCHS Photo

The trestle at the Kentucky Mine is the bridge Emil and Adolf Loeffler built to move weighty ore carts from the portal to the stamp mill. The structure was critical to the milling process when the mine was functioning and has been a vital part of the mine tour since the museum opened in the 1970s. When Sierra County acquired the property, a crew led by local builder Cy Rollins put a foundation under the stamp mill, built a replica of a miner's cabin, and replaced the original trestle, adding safety railings. The ravages of time and weather eventually weakened that structure, and in 1997 Mike Miller's crew from the 16-to-1 Mine was hired to reconstruct it. The project was initially complicated by a water outage and later by an infestation of aggressive yellow jackets, but the trestle was completed in just eight weeks.

Until two years ago, when that second replacement structure was declared hazardous for pedestrians, visitors were able to follow the actual route of the ore, starting in the mine, crossing the trestle, and descending inside the mill all the way to the shaker tables at the lowest level. Crossing the trestle is a huge draw for tourists, not just because it provides clarity to the mining and milling process, but because the view from the top is spectacular. Sierra County Historical Society received a \$96,000 grant

from the Federal Scenic Highway Discretionary Grant Program along with a required \$24,000 match from Sierra County to reconstruct the Kentucky Mine trestle. Unfortunately, costs rose dramatically since the process was initiated, and the lowest competitive bid was \$240,000, double the available funding. A handful of historical society members sprang into action with a vigorous fundraising campaign and raised \$57,340 in just a month. As of December 1, donations are still coming in. The Sierra County Board of Supervisors stepped up and agreed to make up the shortfall so the project can remain on track. The SCHS board would like to thank its members and all the Kentucky Mine aficionados for their tremendous support. This past season the mine attracted almost 2,000 visitors to Sierra County, and we hope to welcome even more when the full tours resume with a sturdy new trestle.



1997 Trestle Work.

SCHS Photo



1997 Trestle Work.

SCHS Photo

➤ 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 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!

Officers and Executive Board of the Sierra County Historical Society

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Become a Member!

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 payable each January for the calendar year. Membership Categories are as follows:

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------|
| INDIVIDUAL | \$20.00 |
| FAMILY & INSITUTION | \$25.00 |
| BUSINESS & SUPPORTING | \$35.00 |
| SUSTAINING | \$50.00 |
| LIFE (per person/couple) | \$400.00 |

In addition, donations are gratefully accepted.

Please send dues and donations to:
S.C.H.S.
c/o Scott Mahtieson, Membership Chair
PO Box 260, Sierra City, CA 96125

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Kentucky Mine and Museum closed for the regular season on September 2, 2024. We reopened for the special event of **Doors Open California 2024** on September 7, 2024. This year, we welcomed our new Manager/Curator, Giguette Knochenhauer. Giguette did a wonderful job leading the operations at the mine, with the very capable assistance of Joanie Engel, Assistant Curator, and Michael Leuzinger, Student Assistant. We are grateful to our volunteer tour guides, Bill Copren, Don McKechnie and Fran Burgard for their valuable help presenting informative tours to our visitors. Season totals were 1997 visitors, 913 guided tours taken with 626 visitors to the museum.

A grant for the trestle repair project was awarded to the County by Cal-Trans; however, due to increased costs of performing the work and a deadline to award the bids received, a committee was formed to raise the gap in funding of \$120,000. An article on the trestle is included in this issue of *The Sierran*. With a December 1, 2024 deadline, we are still collecting very generous donations. Hopefully work will commence this Spring.

The Historical Society once again sponsored the *Music at the Mine* series. This year, the new manager, Erin Wallace, with the guidance of Chris Stockdale, produced five concerts. This year's attendance was lower than in prior seasons, however those who attended were very pleased with the entertainment.

Doors Open California 2024, organized by the California Preservation Foundation, occurred at the Kentucky Mine Museum and Park on September 7, 2024. This year, the Alleghany Underground Museum and Forest City Historical Society Museum joined the event and opened their locations on that same date. It was a great success at each of the three locations.

On September 8th we had our **annual picnic** at Jan and Jim Loverin's Old 1862 Ranch, formerly the Ramelli Dairy Ranch, in the Long Valley portion of Sierra County. Thanks to our gracious hosts, several members and their guests enjoyed a delicious lunch and interesting tour of the dairy buildings and ranch.

Harmony Masonic Lodge No. 164 in Sierra City celebrated the re-dedication of their Masonic building on September 13, 2024. The ceremony was well attended by many Masons as well as the public and Downieville High School students. A historical presentation was made and lunch was served at the Community Hall, then participants went to the 1863 Masonic Hall for the re-dedication.

The **Art + Ag Trail** event was on September 21, 2024, with our participation at the Sierraville School. Once again, we sold books, demonstrated hand-quilting, displayed a timeline of the history of the Sierraville School and provided settings and vintage costumes for old-fashioned photos.

On November 2, 2024, Bill Copren led a walking tour of Sierraville with Scott Mathieson videoing his presentation. There will be a second tour to finish the Sierraville history as part of Bill's interviews by the **Oral History Committee**.

Jan Hamilton, President
Sierra County Historical Society



THE DOWNIEVILLE PAUPERS' CEMETERY

By Corri Jimenez

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Paupers' cemeteries or potters' fields have been around since the dawn of time and were for the interment of the poor, unclaimed, indigent, or simply unknown. Because the indigent could not afford headstones or markers, these cemeteries typically looked like vacant lots.

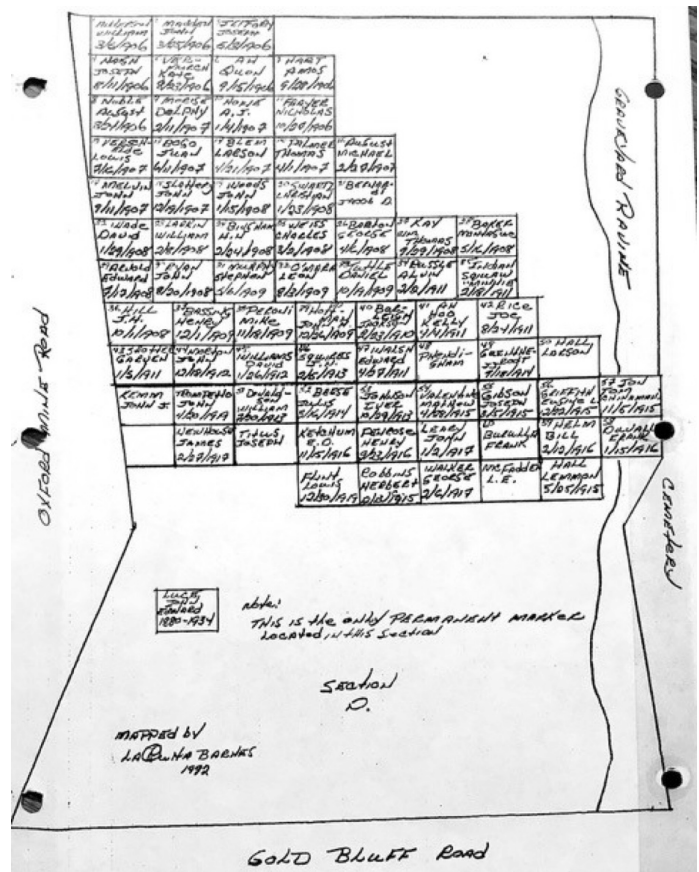
Located west of the historic Downieville Cemetery, the Downieville Paupers' Cemetery, known as "Section D," is off Main Street on Gold Bluff Road. It is bordered to the east by Graveyard Ravine and to the northwest by Oxford Mine Road on the historic Zumwalt Flat. In this cemetery, there were 72 individuals interred between 1906 and 1934. The former steward of the Sierra County Hospital, Joseph Quinn, mapped them on the back of a temperance poster between March 1906 and December 1919. This map was passed from the Quinn family to a relative, George Taylor, who eventually donated it to the Downieville Cemetery District.

LaQuita Barnes was the Downieville Cemetery Coordinator from September 1991-June 1992. She remapped the cemetery and noted those buried were "unmarked or had wooden markers that have been destroyed over the years." The only recorded marker in the cemetery is for John Edward Luce (1880-1934). With no markers, who were the inhabitants of the cemetery? Slowly, I have researched their names and have uncovered birth and death dates via Ancestry.com using the California Death Index of 1905-1939. Additional information can be found at the Sierra County Clerk Recorder's Office and in Sierra County Census data. This data provides an overview of the decedents' lives, what they did, and where they might have lived. Many of the inhabitants were "inmates" at the Sierra County Hospital, built in 1880, and were overseen by Mr. Quinn from 1904 until his retirement in July, 1940. According to Downieville locals who lived near the cemetery, the disastrous 1937 flood swept gravesites away from Graveyard Ravine. The Sierra County Hospital closed in 1958 and in March 1960, the Sierra County Board of Supervisors approved its demolition. The land was subdivided and sold into residential lots as the "700 Block" of Main Street.

Of the 72 names on the cemetery's list, 61 individuals are in the historical record as dying between the ages of 30 and 90. Also noted are a one-year-old infant and eleven other individuals who still need additional research. Regarding the demographics of this cemetery, there were two Chinese men and a Native American woman, but the majority were working class miners and laborers. One prominent individual is Mayflower descendant, Alonzo John Howe, who was born on March 28, 1818. He served as a Sierra County Superior Court Judge, adjudicating the hanging of James O'Neill in 1885. Howe died a pauper on January 4, 1907, at the age of 89. Another individual is George Barton who was

born in England in December 1822, trekked to Downieville in 1849, and owned the High Commission Mine. As a Sierra County notary public, Barton was a witness to the 1851 hanging of Josefa (also known as Juanita). He wrote regularly for the Mountain Messenger and died in 1908 at the age of 86. A third individual is Giovanni "John" Trompetto who was born in 1830 in Ivrea, Italy. He emigrated to California in 1869, was naturalized in 1879, and worked a quartz arrastra in Buttes Ravine in Sierra City. By 1880, Trompetto owned Lot 5 and Lot 10 in the Sierra City Townsite, which was north of the Sierra City Cemetery and Reis Ravine, but he died as a pauper on April 20, 1919, at the age of 89.

In June 2024, the Downieville Improvement Group (DIG), the Downieville Cemetery District, and the Sierra County Historical Society partnered together to hire Tom Nicholson and Mike Karasikis of the Sierra Nevada Ground Scanning Imagery (Sierra Nevada GSI) to do Ground Penetration Radar (GPR) of the cemetery. This technology is used by many professionals, like archeologists, to find disturbances in the soil. As you might have seen on an episode of CSI Vegas, the GPR apparatus resembles a lawnmower and is also pushed across the ground. It uses electromagnetic pulses to discern the location of human remains depicted as depressions that are displayed on a monitor as a series of green and yellow wavy lines.



LaQuita Barnes' map of Section D of the Downieville Paupers' Cemetery

Source: LaQuita Barnes, 1992

Paupers' Cemetery (Cont. onPg. 4) ➔

Starting at a cleared area at the top of the cemetery, the Sierra Nevada GSI team inspected three rows in promising areas and flagged approximately 25 depressions. All the red flags at those depressions were potential graves. Several stone markers (approximately 6" to a 12" in size) resembling headstones were located near many of these depressions. Besides these features, a pipe was also found protruding from the ground, possibly distinguishing plots or a row, as was done in the Downieville Cemetery. Because the paupers were buried in pine boxes, or even possibly cloth, no coffins were anticipated to be found. The burial materials would likely have deteriorated after 100 years underground. Visually, the number of depressions exceeded those shown on Ms. Barnes map, so it can be speculated there are more interred on the land than were recorded. Due to vegetation and debris needing to be cleared, the process was paused.

Although more research can be done to learn about the individuals in the cemetery, knowing the majority of their names and dates is helpful for present-day descendants in ascertaining their ancestors' final resting place. Information about Downieville Paupers' Cemetery and individuals interred there can be found on www.findagrave.com. If anyone wishes to reach out to me, feel free to email me at corri_jimenez@yahoo.com.

Sources:

Barnes, LaQuita. "Section D." Written research provided by Mickie Foster.

Butz, Carl. "Ground Penetration Radar Maps Downieville Cemetery." *Mountain Messenger*, July 5, 2024.

Peterman, Cory. Personal communication, November 23, 2024.

"Sierra City Townsite Map, 1880." Provided by Sierra County.

Sinnott, James. *History of Sierra County: Downieville Gold Town on the Yuba*. Fresno: Mid-Cal Publishers, vol.1, 1983.

Sinnott, James. *History of Sierra County: Sierra City and Goodyears Bar, 1973*.



GPS Screen displaying underground electromagnetic disturbances.

Corri Jimenez Photo



County Hospital Downieville Cal
County Hospital on 700 block of Main Street near the cemetery. Built in 1880 and demolished in 1959. Note the Haven Flume running along Gold Bluff Road to the left.

Downieville Museum Photo

Downieville Paupers Cemetery

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Anderson William H (c.1827-1906) | Madden, John (c.1833-1906) |
| Arnold, Edward (1832-1908) | McFadden, Edward (1840-??) |
| August, Michael (1835-1907) | Melvin, John (c.1838-1907) |
| Baker, Montigue Clark (1828-1908) | Morrison, Dolphy (c.1838-1907) |
| Barton, George (1822-1908) | Morton, John J. (1833-1912) * |
| Bassing, Henry (1825-1909) | Murphy, Stephen (c.1828-1909) |
| Beese, Julius G. (1845-1914) | Newhouse, James (c.1832-1917) |
| Bingham, H.N (c.1833-1908) | Noble, August (1840-1906) |
| Blem, Lars L. (1824-1907) | Omara, Con (c.1825-1909) |
| Bucella, Serafino Frank (1855-??) | Palmer, Thomas F. (1836-1907) |
| Burleigh, Jackson A. (1836-1910) | Penrose, Henry J (1859-1916) |
| Donaldson, William (c.1836-1913) | Peroni, Michael (1826-1909) |
| Duval, Frank (c.1838-1916) | Quon, Ah (c.1829-1906) |
| Flint, Lewis D. (1841-1919) | Rice, Joseph (c.1831-1911) |
| Frayar, Nicholas (1835-1906) | Robbins, Herbert C. (c.1881-1915) |
| Gibson, Joseph Charles (c.1832-1915) | Russell, Alvan (c.1826-1910) * |
| Griffith, Eugene T. (c.1855-1915) | Ryan, John H. (c.1838-1908) |
| Guenthepodt, J.J. (c.1861-1914) | Schwartz, Christia (1907-1908) |
| Hart, Amos (1828-1906) | Shotter, Gawen (c.1829 -1911) * |
| Haigh, Joseph C. (c.1831-1906) | Slattery, John L. (c.1848-1907) |
| Helm, William Holton (1832-1916) | Squires, John H. (c.1825-1913) |
| Hill, John H. (c.1873-1908) | Trompetto, Giovanni "John" (c.1830-1919) |
| Hoffman, John H. (c.1825-1909) | Tuttle, Daniel (c.1827-1909) |
| Howe, Alonzo John (1818-1907) | Valentine, Matthew (1831-1915) * |
| Jeffroy, Joseph (c.1825-1906) | Vermursn, Kat (c.1848-1906) |
| Johnson, Ivery (1827-1913) | Verscheidli, Louis (c.1833-1907) |
| Kay, William Thomas (c.1850-1908) | Wade, David A (1824-1908) |
| Kelly, Ah (c.1836-1911) | Walker, George E. (c.1866-1917) |
| Ketchum, Edwin Downer (c.1825-1916) | Walsh, Edward (c.1831-1911) * |
| Larkin, William (c.1844-1908) | Weiss, Charles (c.1826-1908) |
| Leary, John (c.1847-1916) | Williams, David (c.1830-1912) * |
| Lemmon, Hall (1844-1915) | Woods, John (1839-1908) |
| Luce, John Edward (c.1888-1934) | |

*Inmates in the Sierra County Hospital

MUSIC AT THE MINE

BY ERIN WALLACE



The Sierra County Historical Society's Music at the Mine summer concert series had another season to remember in 2024, filled with unforgettable performances, vibrant energy, camaraderie, and some wild weather extremes.

Music (Cont. on Pg 5) ➔

With a lineup featuring incredible bands like *Mumbo Gumbo*, *Everyday Outlaw*, *Danny Horton Trio*, *Mescalito*, *Object Heavy*, and *GrooveSession*, the series brought an eclectic mix of music to the heart of the Sierra Nevada. Concert-goers experienced everything from grooving in 90-degree heat with *Mescalito* to that one night in August where we shivered in 40-degree weather with *Mumbo Gumbo*! Each show offered magical moments and unique musical experiences, making this year's series truly special.

Looking ahead to Summer 2025, *Music at the Mine* is already planning to bring more incredible bands to the stage. With tickets priced between \$30 and \$40 per show, the concert series offers not only fantastic music but also an unforgettable atmosphere. Guests enjoy golf cart rides up the hill to the amphitheater, where the stunning mine backdrop and exceptional acoustics (plus free popcorn!) create the perfect setting for an evening of music under the stars. Remember, kids under 12 get FREE admission! To stay updated on band announcements, show dates, and to catch photos and videos from this past summer, be sure to follow *Music at the Mine* on Facebook and Instagram @Musicatthemine.

Join us for a show, support local music, and help keep the rhythm of Sierra County alive!

For questions, comments, concerns and support email *Music at the Mine* producer: Erin Wallace at erin.musicatthemine@gmail.com

➤ CAST OF CHARACTERS ➤

Every small town has a past chock full of eccentrics and oddballs, and their antics make great stories to pass down through the generations. Starting in this issue the Sierran will entertain you with some of their mischief and mayhem. Debuting in "Cast of Characters" is Father Robert Connelly, portrayed here by Derek Beverly. If you would like to share anecdotes about your favorite personality in a future issue, email your submission to mnourse46@gmail.com

FATHER ROBERT CONNELLY

When I was a young boy growing up in Sierra City during the 1970s, my parents, Mary and Bill Beverly, owned and operated the Sierra Chalet Motel. Towards the rear of the property was our local Catholic Church, and the roving priest was none other than Father Robert Connelly, who occasionally would help himself to a room key and meals with us.

On one occasion, our family vehicle was in the shop for repairs, and we had no mode of transportation. Father Connelly became aware of this and told my mom he'd provide us with transportation. A day or so later, he delivered our temporary family ride, a nearly new, black hearse complete with chrome emblems on the back side panel.

Fortunately, it was empty!

One day I remember going to Grass Valley with my mom "in our new ride." While en route we came upon some CalTrans road construction on Hwy. 49 going up Depot Hill. When they saw us approaching, the work crews removed their hats and immediately passed us on through the construction!

Occasionally, I was an altar boy at our local Catholic Church for Father Robert Connelly. One Sunday as he arrived at the church he met me in his vehicle outside, and asked for my assistance. (I was already in my white robe!) He then instructed me to remove the loose spare tire in the trunk and take it up to the altar inside the church! During the service, just prior to passing the donation basket, he grabbed the tire and rolled it down the aisle, reminding attendees that he needed new tires for his ride! He did a similar thing on a later occasion, but this time he removed one of his shoes and threw it into the pews, stating he needed new shoes!

SIERRA CITY STORIES

A group of locals published Sierra City Sesquicentennial Story in 2014 to commemorate our post office's 150th birthday. Now, ten years later, I think it's about time to reprise some of the fun tales and photos from that booklet. Mary Nourse

During the heyday of the mines, Sierra City had an ethnic mix as rich as her ore. Settlements of Swedes, Italians, Chinese, Scots, Frenchmen, and Cornish "Cousin Jacks and Jennies" inhabited various neighborhoods. At the west end of town (current site of Sierra Pines Resort) the 320-acre Sierra Buttes Ranch was homesteaded and operated by a series of Frenchmen, and later by several Italian families. "The Flat", where the Sierra City Park is now located, was populated by Cornish miners. A Chinese section was across from the Methodist Church; uphill from there was the red-light district. On Wild Plum Road was an area designated "Pest House Flat", where folks with contagious diseases like smallpox were quarantined.

Life was harsh for every man, woman, and child. Well into the 1900's, Sierra City was isolated by snow, with no freight deliveries from November until Easter. Miners often trudged eight or more miles to work, returning home only once or twice a week. Housewives stored hundreds of pounds of staples, numerous kegs of brined fish, salt pork, and pickled eggs. They often baked Cornish pasties for their husbands' lunch buckets. A pasty is half-moon shaped meat pie with a thick crimped crust along the curved edge. The miners used the crusts as handles, and then threw them away because their dirty hands often were contaminated with traces of arsenic. The discarded crusts served as appeasements to the "Tommyknockers", spirits of departed miners said to help them find ore and stay safe.

City Stories (Cont. on Pg 6) ➤

They allegedly knocked on the walls of the mines right before a cave-in. Cornish kids took pasties to school and would trade with other immigrant children for Italian raviolis or German sausage.

A stroll around Sierra City today can be a real trip down memory lane for longtime residents like me. Just the sight a particular building sparks reminiscence. Take for example Annie Moon's former home on Butte Street, just up the hill from the Methodist Church. The dear old Scottish lady lived a mundane life there with her husband Ed, but as a young woman, she had travelled abroad as companion to Mrs. Knight who later built Vikingsholm Castle at Lake Tahoe. Her life in Sierra City was far from glamorous though. I recall that in the 1970s she cooked year-round on a woodstove in their tiny primitive cabin.

Kris Frost, a neighbor who lived at 105 Butte Avenue in the 1950s, shared her memory of an encounter with Annie: "When I was 7 years old, and my youngest sister had just been born, I proceeded to load her into a doll buggy and push her down the hill to the café that my grandparents owned. (Now the Red Moose.) Mrs. Moon stopped me, looked into the doll carriage and asked if my mother knew that I had my baby sister in there. I lied through my teeth, told her, 'yes,' and on I went. When I got to the café my grandmother saw what was in the doll buggy, and she gave me one of the worst spankings I have ever had! My sister was not even 2 weeks old."

Another fun story took place in, or more precisely under, the Methodist Church on Butte Street. As an adolescent in the 1950s young Francis, "Pat" Hill and a buddy decided to test out beer-making techniques that were outlined in Popular Mechanics magazine. Pat knew that this activity would not be sanctioned at home, particularly since his dad was undersheriff at the time. The clever lad settled on the crawl space under the Methodist Church as the ideal location for his cache of beer to cure. And cure it did. So well, in fact, that Eric Ostrom would raid the supply when he was ensconced in a pew, sleeping off a bender. And so very well that one hot summer Sunday, the bottles exploded during church services.



Pat Hill is on the far left.

SCHS Photo

Going way back in time, a more serious drama once unfolded next to the Sierra Country Store in the center of town. On September 25, 1886, The Mountain Messenger reported the disturbing incident. "Wednesday afternoon a shooting affray took place in the Columbia(sic) Saloon between Antone DeMartini and Jo Lagormarsino, when the latter was instantly killed. Coroner Parker came up and held an inquest Thursday. It seems that there had been trouble between the two men for some time, and that had been steadily growing. They met in the Columbia Saloon, and Lagormarsino said, "What are you doing here?" DeMartini answered, "I have as much right here as you have." Lagomarsino was seen to have a pistol in his hand, with the muzzle in the front pocket of his pants. DeMartini went behind the bar, got a pistol, and came out: Lagomarsino opened fire and seven or eight shots were fired between them. The examination was not completed at this writing. They were both natives of Italy."



The stone building, thought to be the Columbo Saloon.

SCHS Photo

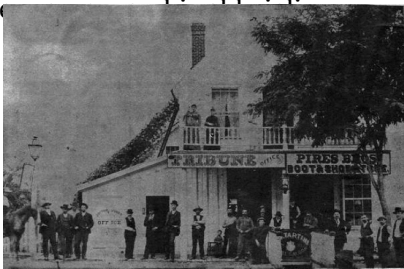
Across the street from the Sierra Country Store, is the Old Sierra City Hotel. Irene Cogley Rowley who ran a string of 15 "jacks" (donkeys) to supply the mines in the early 1900s tells that John Rose, owner of the Capitol Hotel (also known as the lower hotel and later the Sierra Buttes Inn), convinced her father to run the hotel for him for a few months in 1915 because he wanted to take his family to the World's Fair in San Francisco. Rose didn't return for two years. According to Rowley, "It was quite a lively town when the mines were working, a lot of saloons. My dad ran the lower hotel a couple of years. Now there was a bar there and at the upper hotel there was a bar, and Thompsons had a saloon. Phelans had a saloon and Pat Spelberg had a saloon, and a fellow by the name of Carrollo, an Italian fella had a saloon, and then they had a saloon in the store, Castagna Store, and they had a saloon or bar at the lower hotel or the Capitol Hotel and down at what we called the Italian Hotel, which is known as the Zurloff (sic). That used to be where all the Italians went."

In the second half of the 20th Century, Doc and Edie Negus ran the Sierra Buttes Inn, formerly and currently the Old Sierra City Hotel. Doc's good nature and Edie's home cooked meals sustained the community, but the dining room's real attraction was the gallery of caricatures of local residents done by world-renowned artist Frank Willmarth ("Pancho").

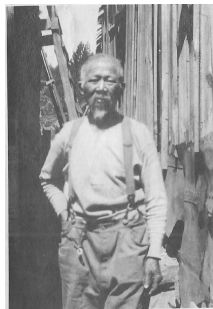


Freeman's Stage in front of the Sierra City Hotel.

Another large historic structure, Tita's Hideaway, once stood at 204 Main Street. Unfortunately, the building was destroyed by fire in 2018. This was a significant loss to the community, because of its colorful past. The building housed a number of businesses over the years, including the Tribune newspaper, a doctor's office, a shoe store, and even a jail. At one time it was the location of Lottie's Boarding House. "Queen Louie", the last surviving Chinese person in Sierra City was a friend of Lottie's family. He was known as a very sensitive and humble man who would honor the dead with bouquets of wildflowers and serenade



Tita's Hideaway when it housed the Tribune and a shoe store.



Queen Louie

Also on Main Street, you'll find the modern Sierra City Post Office next to the Country Store. The original post office was established in 1864, and it was located in various buildings over the years including the E Clampus Vitus Store at the Busch Building. A local teacher, Alba Cox, served as postmistress from 1918 to 1948 when the office was housed at the site of the current "Western White House".



Alba Cox



The Busch Building once housed the Post Office.

If you wander the side street by the community hall you can catch a whiff of greatness, because Sierra City once had a world-famous Italian chef in residence. Mario Piccolo, owner/operator of San Francisco's Blue Fox Restaurant had a vacation cabin near the top of Castagna Alley. He prepared exquisite meals for his friends on the patio, utilizing wild mushrooms, home-grown produce, fresh trout from an outdoor aquarium, and roasted prime rib alfresco. I once walked by on a spring day, and Mario shouted out to me, "We roasted a goat on Easter. We forgot to invite you!"

St. Thomas Catholic Church on Butte Avenue is a "mission church", so over time, priests have traveled from great distances to say Mass there. Derek Beverly, who was a teenager in the 1960s living at his parents' Sierra Chalet Motel, has wild and crazy memories of Father Robert Connolly, a roving priest from Grass Valley and Truckee. See what Derek has to say about the good priest in our new Cast of Characters column.

I have to smile every time I pass St. Thomas because there is a funny story about its decor. In the early 1980's, I was friends with Dan Lewis when he was hired to spruce up the interior paint job. The current priest, Father Liam McCarthy, wanted a deep forest green-the color Mr. Lewis had used for our parlor at Holly House. The Altar Society ladies all favored sky blue, and they ultimately won out, very possibly because Mrs. Lewis was part of the altar society. The good-natured Dan Lewis wasn't done with it though. He painted everything just the way the ladies wanted, but added a touch of his own. High above the altar, he painted a prominent architectural ornament a putrid green that he concocted just to shock Father McCarthy when he processed up the aisle on Sunday. His intent was to repaint it after everyone had a good laugh, but before he had a chance to cover it up, he died of a heart attack while square-dancing. The putrid decoration remains to this day.



St. Thomas Church interior in the early 1900s.

Not far from the St. Thomas, is the Sierra City Cemetery. Few of its gravestones tell a sadder tale than the demise of little Louise Kaiser of Loganville.

City Stories (Cont. on Pg 8) ➔

The Sierran

Sierra County Historical Society

P.O. Box 260

Sierra City, California 96125

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

In September of 1883, the toddler was poisoned along with three of her siblings when they ate bologna purchased from a peddler. A neighbor saved Louise's siblings by administering tobacco as an emetic, but she did not survive. She was buried in Sierra City, and within a year her father August Kaiser also died and was buried next to his dear daughter, Louise Regina.

Close neighbors to the Kaisers in the cemetery are Eric Ostrom and Axel Anderson. These two friends actually share a grave, due to a pact they made to be buried together when they were young men. Axel died first in 1937 and was buried deep enough to leave space for his friend. When Eric died forty years later, he was buried on top of his buddy and with the bottle of "Viskey" that he requested.

This historic photograph of the Teubert House on Cemetery Road has an interesting tale to tell. As you can see, the porch has several caged birds that were probably more than just house pets. Miners sometimes took canaries into the mines as an early-warning signal for toxic gases, such as carbon monoxide. Since the birds are more sensitive than humans, they would become sick before the miners, who would then have a chance to escape.



Teubert house on Cemetery Road
SCHS Photo



Eric Ostrom operated a full-service garage on Main Street, next to the Zerloff Hotel. Shown here in the 1950s in front of the building are Sonny Sawyer (seated), Rich Nourse, Walter Loffmark, and Laurel Miller
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