

Yankee Hill Dispatch

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The Yankee Hill Dispatch is published three times per year. The next newsletter will be in February 2008. We want to take this opportunity to wish you all....

Happy Holidays

Concow Valley and Cherokee in the 1880's

The 1870's had been a time of excitement in the foothills. The building of the Concow dam in 1871 and the various flumes that supplied water to Cherokee and Yankee Hill, allowing year round mining, brought prosperity to the area. The Spring Valley Mining and Irrigation Company, as it was known after 1875, was making lots of money. The company's capital stock in 1875 was valued at over \$5,000,000. Hydraulic mining in Cherokee was running at full throttle. The population of Cherokee and nearby Oregon City is listed as 1911 people in the 1880 census.

President Hayes visits Cherokee

For Cherokee, 1880 had a disastrous start as a fire in March consumed Miller's Meat Market, a saloon and Chamber's Hall, which also served as a school. But the mines were productive in spite of heavy costs to repair the sluice boxes. In August of 1880 two gold bricks were shipped out that were valued at \$75,000 to \$100,000. On October 2, 1880 President Rutherford Hayes and his wife along with General Sherman visited Cherokee. The group had been staying with General Bidwell in Chico as part of a cross country tour when they made the one day trip. The Oroville paper reported that it was so windy and dusty that entire day that "one would have been at a loss to ascertain their race from the color of their faces" Mrs. Bidwell tried her hand at gold panning and General Sherman operated the water nozzle. Lunch had been arranged by General Bidwell but the driver got lost on the way and didn't arrive until the party was leaving.

One ominous event in June 1880 for Cherokee was the filing of a lawsuit by G.W. Colby claiming \$41,250 for damages from lost crops the last three years because of tailings from hydraulic mining ruining his land. Over the next several years many more lawsuits would follow.

Spring Valley Mining and Irrigation Company Troubles

In April of 1880, Frank McLaughlin was in Oroville promoting the coming of the Edison Oro Mining Company. Backed by Thomas Edison, the company had developed a new way of separating gold from the tailings of mining. The company was incorporated with \$350,000 in capital stock. The article in the local paper stated the company would soon be setting up furnaces in the Oroville area. This created a lot of excitement in the area but in the end the venture never materialized. Instead Frank McLaughlin would become associated with a New York conglomerate that would buy several local mining operations along with the Spring Valley Mining and Irrigation Company and form a new company, the Spring Valley Hydraulic Gold Company. The company began making improvements to the operations including adding electric lights in the mines. But the cost of forming the new company, making the improvements and the daily operating costs would soon become a financial burden. In April of 1882, the company could not make the payroll and was unable to pay the miners. The miners went out on strike, eventually returning to work. But the lawsuits and financial problems persisted.

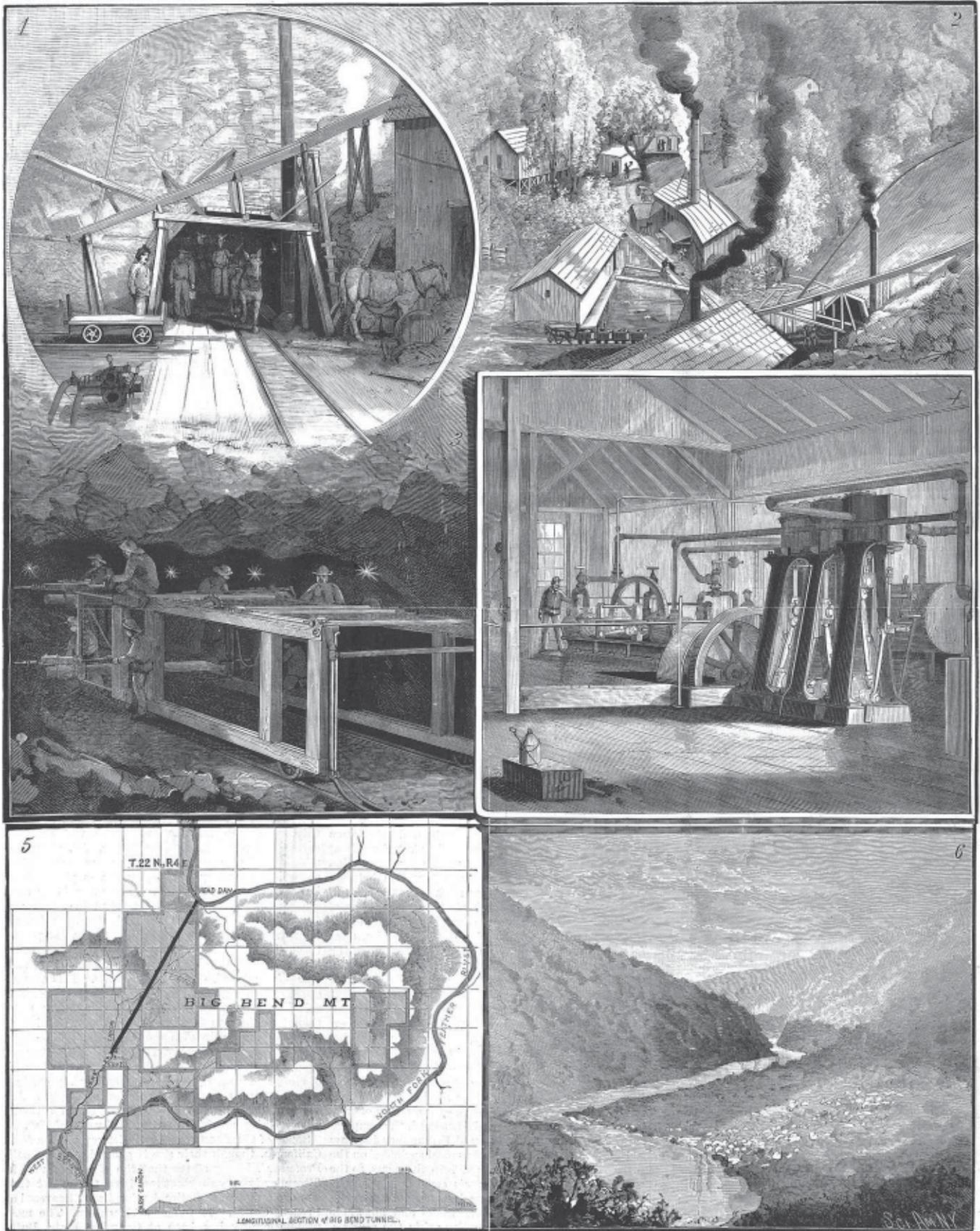
In May of 1886, the Butte Record reported that hydraulic mining would soon probably stop because of legislation. In March 1887, an article appeared in the papers listing the Spring Valley Company's expenditures from 1870 until July 1886. Ditches, reservoirs and piping costs \$510,820, mining plants and tunnels \$199,780, purchasing property \$461,435, cost of debris canal \$270,821, mining expenses including repairs of ditches \$1,759,853. Total expenses \$3,622,198. Total value of gold recovered \$5,008,108 for a net profit of \$1,386,010. It was estimated by the reporter that before 1870 \$5,000,000 in gold had been recovered by previous mining operations. But times were changing and legislation finally passed outlawing hydraulic mining. In August of 1887, the Spring Valley Hydraulic Gold Company closed its doors.

The Big Bend Tunnel

The Scientific American, published in New York on February 6, 1886 carried several front page sketches of the tunnel being built at Big Bend on the Feather River. Financed by Doctor Pierce of Pierce's patent medicine fame, the tunnel was an attempt to drain the Feather River around Big Bend so that the gold in the river could be recovered.

In April 1887, an article appeared in the local papers about the progress of the Big Bend Tunnel. Since the 1850's, miners had been recovering gold along the banks of the river at Big Bend. But they could only mine when the river was low in the summer. By cutting a tunnel through the hillside, which would allow water to bypass Big Bend, the gold at the bottom of the Feather River would be exposed. The article quotes many early miners who had taken large amounts of gold from the banks of the Feather River at Big Bend. Mr. Pierce had employed Professor Thomas Price, a noted mining expert on the West Coast to survey the area and he agreed the plan would yield large amounts of gold. This was an ambitious operation financed primarily by Mr. Pierce. The company had built its own sawmill at Big Bend to provide the lumber for the tunnel. During construction the plan was modified and the tunnel enlarged to handle a larger flow of water. In September of 1887 another article stated the tunnel was nearly finished. Next the flumes would be put in, wheels built and motors installed to generate electricity. The river would be drained and the mining started by the fall of 1888.

The 12,000 foot long, 13 foot high, 16 foot wide tunnel was completed and the river was drained. Unfortunately, there was no gold. Apparently, there were too many large rocks to move and the swift



1. Entrance of Tunnel. 2. Buildings and Plant in Dark Canon. 3. Drill Carriage. 4. Air Compressors. 5. Map of Big Bend and Line of Tunnel. 6. View of Island Bar, Feather River.

THE BIG BEND TUNNEL IN BUTTE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA.—[See page 85.]

currents had carried the gold to the banks of the Feather River where the earlier miners had picked it all up. The water was allowed to return to the Feather River. In 1910, the Big Bend tunnel was used by the newly formed Great Western Power Company to send water to the Las Plumas Power Plant below. As for Dr. Pierce, between 1873 and 1886 it is estimated he sold \$5,665,000 worth of his patent medicines at an average of \$1.00 per bottle. The cost to produce the medicines was probably less than 20% of the sale price. He also founded the Pierces Medical Institute; Mr. Pierce died a wealthy man. Many of his medicines were sold until the 1940's by his successors.

The Concow Valley

In the 1870's the five largest landowners in the Concow Valley were Robert Wisert, who had purchased Robert Workman's 160 acres in 1870, his neighbor G.G. Marquis, who owned 160 acres (both were in the area that is now known as Camelot), Wm Farley who owned 160 acres just South of Marquis and Joseph Mullen who owned 160 acres just South of Wm Farley. All of these landowners were located at the North end of Concow Reservoir. Rufus North was the fifth landowner who owned 320 acres at the South end of Concow Reservoir. Around 1879 the Central Pacific Railroad started buying vacant land in Concow Valley for a proposed railroad (Founded in 1903, the Western Pacific Railroad Company would eventually build the railroad).

In 1880, the changing conditions prompted some land owners to sell their property. G.G. Marquis sold his property and purchased a smaller 70 acre section at the South end of the reservoir. Rufus North sold his 320 acres to E.B. Wright and Louis Glass, the Secretary of the Spring Valley Mining Company.

In 1882 a post office was established at the home and hotel of Joseph Mullen. The Reservoir School, opposite the Mullen home had been operating since 1880. In 1885 the Reservoir School had a budget for supplies of \$12.80.

Joseph Mullen in 1882 held a temperance meeting at the hotel. Mullen, as was Bidwell, was against the use of alcohol and was a strong temperance supporter. He signed up 24 new members at the meeting; the cost to join was \$1.25 per year. But in 1886 Joseph Mullen sold his property (probably because he knew the hotel business was not going to be profitable after the mines closed) to a man named Scott and another named Stone and moved to Arizona where he died in 1934. His brother, William Mullen continued to live on his property at Big Bend.

The Concow Reservoir continued to provide water to the mining operations in Cherokee until the mines closed in 1887. That same year a new community West of Oroville was being developed. Promoted as a prime area for agriculture, people who purchased land for \$50 to \$150 per acre were given free water for the first three years. The new community of Thermalito was destined to play a major role in the Concow Valley's future.

Yankee Hill

Yankee Hill was fairly quiet in the 1880's. The major landowners around Yankee Hill in the 1880's were John Hufford, Antone Hodapp, Caleb Nix, Wm. Sweetman, Michael Wells and farther South in Rich Gulch, John Fuchey. Michael Wells continued to operate his hotel, store and the post office at Yankee Hill during this time. Unfortunately, Cherokee had stolen much of Yankee Hill's thunder. On July 4, 1887 a large ball was held in Yankee Hill with attendees from Oroville, Chico, Concow, Big Bend, Cherokee, Pentz and

Magalia. Mr. Wells and others at Yankee Hill still had strong connections in the community. But by 1891, when Wells passed away, Yankee Hill was in decline. His wife, Dora, continued to operate the hotel, store and post office while raising their two children, Michael and John.

Flea Valley

Although never a large community, the lumber industry sustained Flea Valley during the 1880's. In 1886, Betty and George Duensing operated the hotel. The hotel had been established by Gus Fairbanks sometime earlier for those visiting the lumber camp.

The 1890's

The 1880's ended as it had began for Cherokee with another fire destroying eight buildings. Attempts would be made to reopen the Cherokee mines using more conventional mining methods. They would last a year or two and close down again. The 1890's were quiet as people slowly left the area. Mining in the area had returned to smaller ventures using conventional methods. The largest producers of gold were the dredgers on the Feather River. They would last into the 1920's until dredging would also become outlawed. The dredging by-product, the rock piles along Highway 70 can still be seen today.

Next time - The Concow dam fails again and an electric company becomes the new owner of Concow Reservoir.



Cherokee circa 1890

YHHS Happenings

School House Renovation - By the time you receive this newsletter the floors in the old school house will have been refinished! There is a picket fence out front and a newly planted garden with old roses. The Messilla Valley School has never looked better! We want to thank everyone that made this project a great success. The school house is a great addition to the community and a testament to the efforts of all those that worked so hard - **THANK YOU-THANK YOU-THANK YOU**

First Saturday each month, Bunko Party!! - The first Saturday of each month at 1:00pm we have a bunko party at the old school. Prizes and a raffle are held to raise funds for the school restoration. The restoration crew has been feverishly working on the school and we want to make sure we can provide the materials to keep them going! The money raised from the bunko party is a primary contributor to the restoration fund. It is fun and supports a great cause. **SEE YOU THERE!**

Yankee Hill Historical Society Web Page - You can visit our web page at www.yankeehillhistory.com. The web page has copies of some of the 1880's newspaper articles used as reference in this newsletter article, so you can read them for yourself!

YHHS Wish List - Donations or financial assistance are always welcome!

A lockable FIREPROOF, four drawer filing cabinet - As we begin building our archives, the Yankee Hill Historical Society is in need of a lockable fireproof filing cabinet to store small artifacts, copies of pictures and other documents. If you have one you want to get rid of or you know where we can purchase one CHEAP! Please contact us.

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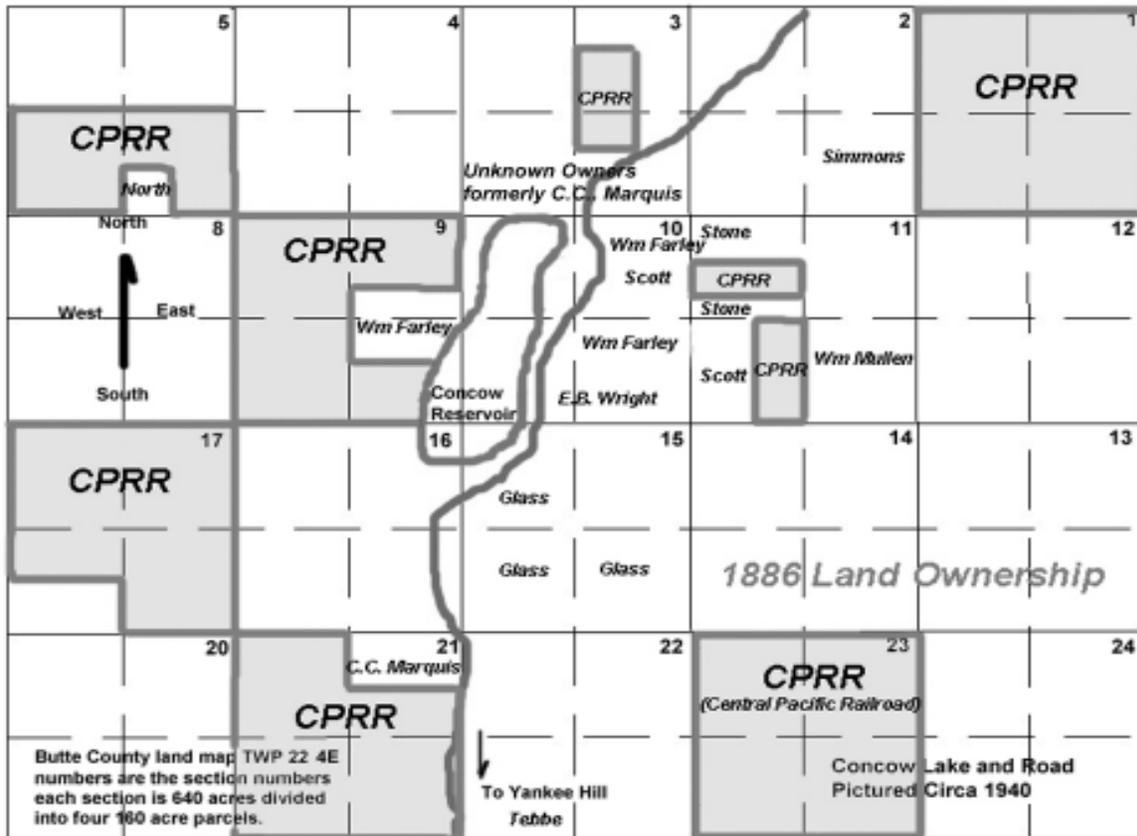
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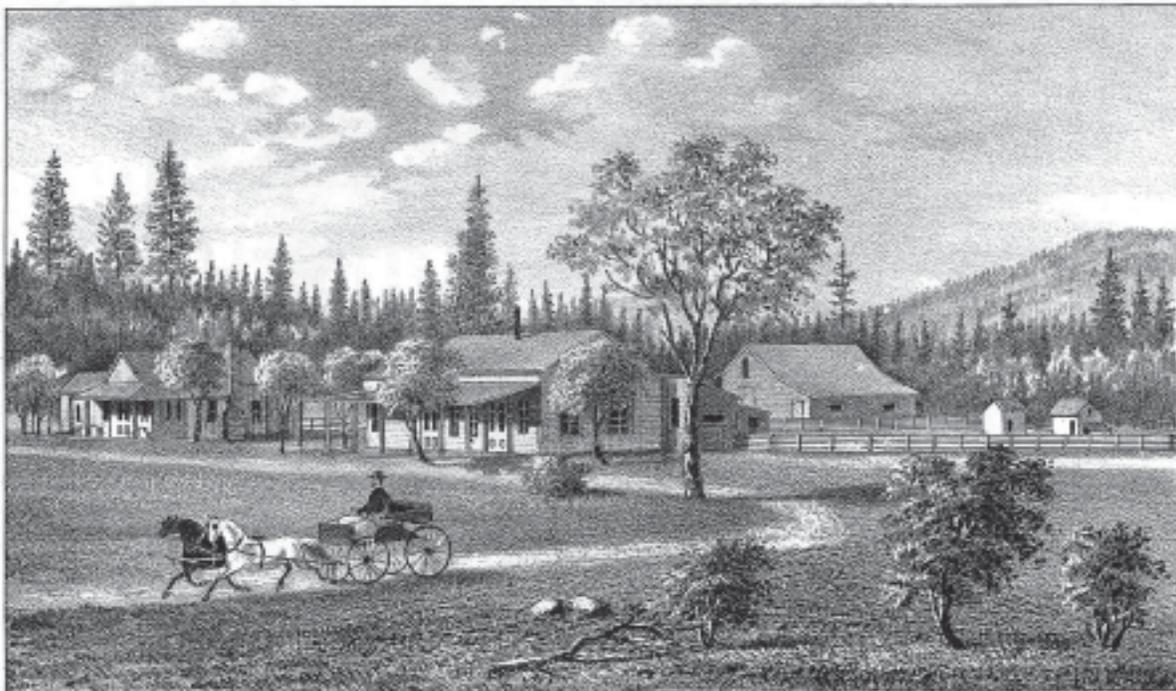
A big **Thank You** to the LAW DAWGS for their participation at the July celebration!

They did a great job in the heat and we really appreciate it! Next year we **WILL** move the celebration to a cooler month.



Land owners in Concow in 1886

In 1868 a federal law was passed that opened up odd numbered sections of public land for sale to the railroads for possible rail sites at \$2.50 per acre as long as they were not already claimed by, or would harm, private citizens.



STORE AND RESIDENCE OF M.H.WELLS,
YANKEE HILL, BUTTE CO. CAL.

Wells home circa 1882

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