

Yankee Hill Dispatch

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The Yankee Hill Dispatch is published one time per year. In each issue we include an article about the area's history. We also publish the Yankee Hill Newsletter two times per year, which is a smaller publication with some history and articles about what the Yankee Hill Historical Society is doing.

History of Big Bend

Big Bend plays an interesting and important part in the Concow, Yankee Hill and even Belden history. The earliest uses of the term big bend are confined to the mining operations along the Feather River. Big bend was a term used to describe the sweeping bend in the Feather River. The area 1600 feet above the mining operations was referred to as part of Yankee Hill.

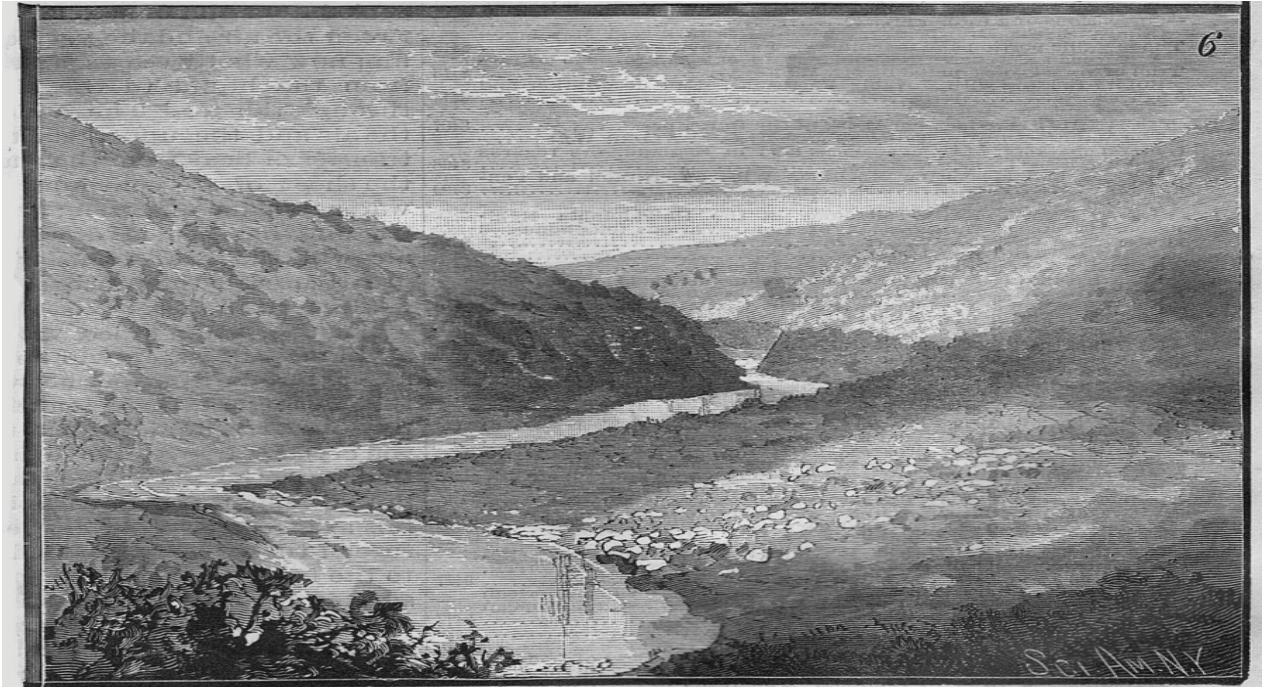
Early Mining at the "Big Bend"

In the early 1850's there were several small mining operations along the big bend of the Feather River. Shields Gulch (named after James Shields, a miner from England who mined there in 1850) Lattimore's Bar (named after two brothers William and Robert Lattimore from Pennsylvania who also mined in the area in 1850. William Lattimore would later become Treasurer for Butte County), Hough's Bar, later named Whiskey Town and finally Inlet (was named after Giles and Barton Hough, 1850's miners from Indiana). French Creek, Wild Yankee Bar and Berry Creek Bar were also early mining sites along the big bend of the Feather River. In the 1850's these were primarily summer mining sites due to the rising of the Feather River in winter and the fast currents. In 1857 the founder of Pentz, Manoah Pence along with 12 other miners filed a claim on the Big Bend Ledge near the North Fork of the Feather River. But by the late 1850's, like most other early mining sites in the area, the easily attained gold started to play out. But a few of these river sites continued to be mined off and on for years.

Island Bar

One of these early sites with a long history is now under Lake Oroville, it was called Island Bar. Island Bar, on the rivers edge was located below Shields Gulch. In August 1854 Louis Marx and George Garriott filed a claim along the river's edge that was between the "riffles of Island bar and the riffles of Diamond Bar", located downstream. In this case riffles are a natural formation under the water that acts like a sluice box, using water pressure to separate the heavier gold which drops into the riffles from other sediments as they pass over the riffles. Over a period of time the gold deposits would be replenished at Island Bar. Over

the years a number of people filed claims at Island Bar, among those were A.B. Clark in 1859. Ah Ling and a group of Chinese miners in 1877 filed a claim at Island Bar. In 1878 Ah Too and nine other Chinese miners filed their claim at Island Bar. The 1862, 1877 and 1886 maps of Butte County all indicate there were several structures built at Island Bar, presumably some were living accommodations. As late as 1948 Manford Cochran filed a claim at Island Bar. Small groups of individuals filed claims in 1954 and 1957. In 1967 when Lake Oroville started filling with water the history of Island Bar was finished.



Island Bar as shown in 1888 sketch in Scientific American

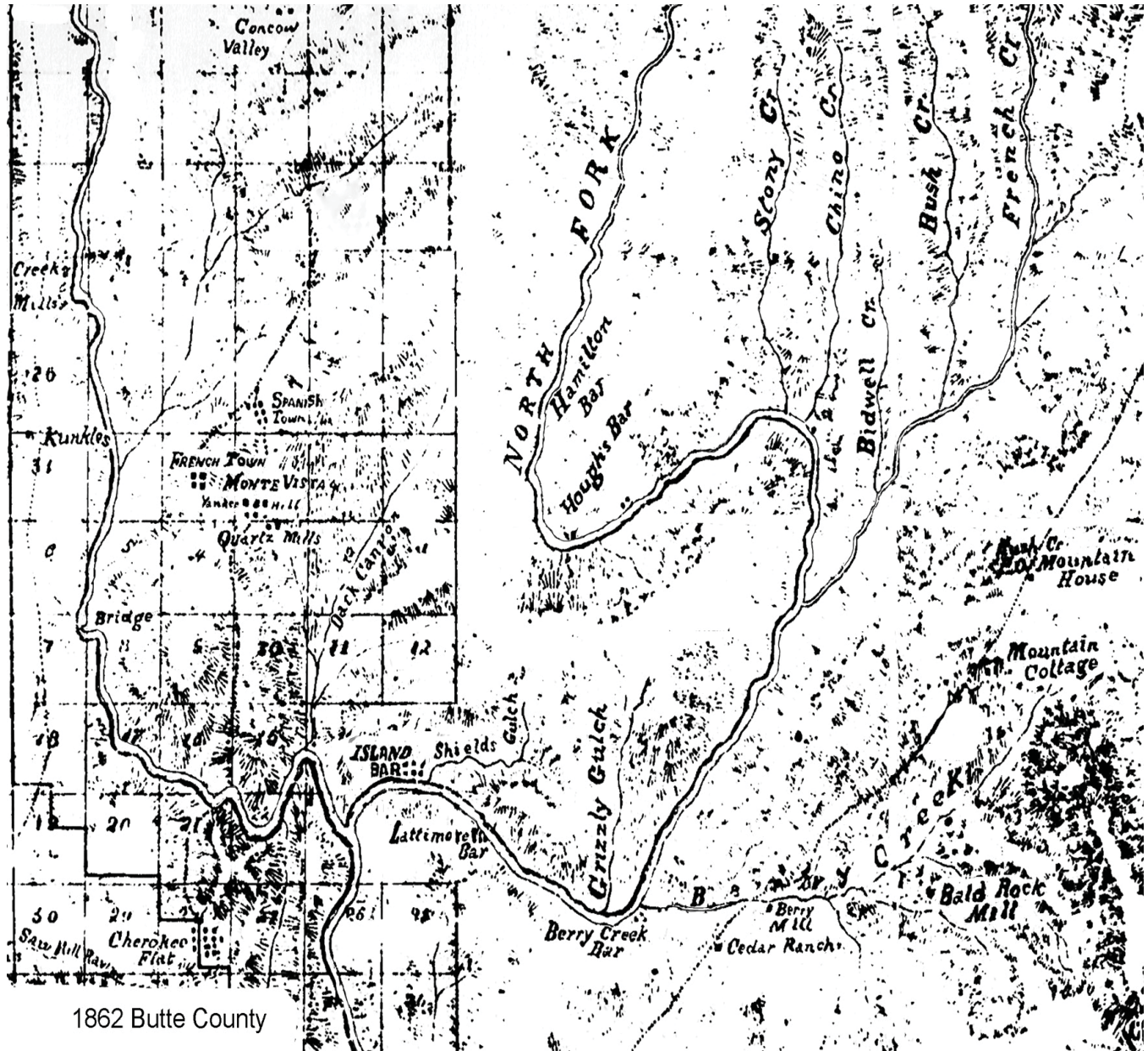


Island Bar Flood

Island Bar, probably taken during the 1903 flood on the Feather River

The 1862 Survey of Butte County

Butte County started surveying portions of the county to establish boundaries to assist in identifying locations of land parcels or early land patents on deeds. The county was divided up into Townships each containing 23,040 acres, which were divided up into 36 Sections each containing 640 acres which were divided up again into quarter sections containing 160 acres. The 1862 Homestead Act allowed people to claim 160 acres as homesteads based on this survey.



Notice the area we now call Big Bend in 1862 had not yet been surveyed. The shape of the bend in the river would be significantly changed in later maps after the survey was completed.

Yankee Hill Indians Vacate Their Homes Atop the Big Bend in the Feather River

In Sept 1859, a large number of the Indian population had been forcibly removed from the area north of the Concow Valley by troops under S.D. Johns. He captured about 200 Concow, Kimshew and Tigers Indians without a shot being fired, taking them to Chico in preparation for removal to the reservations.

By 1863 the Yankee Hill Indians living above the Big Bend in the Feather River, known as the Che-Es-Sees, were the largest and last significant sized Indian population in the immediate area. The Indians at Berry Creek were also associated with this group. In what we now call Big Bend there were four to five Indian Villages whose inhabitants numbered approximately 300. These Indians were also a part of the Concow Indians. Susan Belden's (whom Belden is named after) mother is believed to be from the Yankee Hill tribe. Michael Wells' relationship with these Indians was such that in 1863 when hostilities heightened in this area, Wells went so far as to hide 40 Indians in the basement of his store when the local militia came to Yankee Hill looking for Indians they labeled as troublemakers. However later in Sept 1863, when the second roundup of Butte County Indians was inevitable, Michael Wells was assigned or probably volunteered for the task of removing the Indians in the Yankee Hill area, most likely to capitalize on his relationships and to avoid unnecessary violence. Wells recommended to their Chief, Uh Lee Ma, that they should travel to Chico Landing and join the other Indians assembled there where they would be escorted to Round Valley. Due to recent killings including several children by renegade Indians from the North, the hostilities in the area were so high that Wells advised the Chief that he could not guarantee the Indians would be safe any longer. Approximately 220 members of the Yankee Hill tribe voluntarily traveled to Chico. Wells would later bring in another 50 sick and elderly Indians via horse and wagon to Chico. This left the area above the big bend in the Feather River open to new settlers.



French Creek Near Big Bend

French Creek was one of the largest of several creeks feeding into the Feather River at Big Bend. At one time there was talk of building a dam and power station at French Creek. See map later in this article for location.

The Clark Family and the Yankee Hill Indians.

A.B. Clark mined at Island Bar, below Shields Gulch in 1859. Shields Gulch was below one of the large Indian Village sites at Big Bend. It was at this time he took Yohema as his wife. Yohema Clark was the daughter of a Concow Chief. It appears that Yohema's mother and brothers lived with the Yankee Hill Indians. What isn't clear is if Yohema's father was the Concow Chief rounded up in 1859 who spoke perfect English or the Chief of the Yankee Hill Indians, who were also Concow Indians, who traveled to Chico in 1863. The evidence suggests the latter as Katie Clark, Yohema's daughter, in a letter written in 1930 talks about her mother Yohema with a small child watching her family marching down the road as she looked out the second story window, never seeing her family again. This would have been in 1863. Yohema and Alfred Burr Clark at that time had at least one child. The Clark home was located down the hill from Yankee Hill but was not a two story house. The Yankee Hill Hotel owned by Michael Wells is the only known two story building in the area in 1863. (The Clark family remained very active in mining in the area for many years, especially Yohema and Alfred Burr Clark's son John Adam Clark. John had a farm and raised a family on Pinkston Canyon Road. His wife, Arilee (Rashe) Clark served as a midwife for many local families)

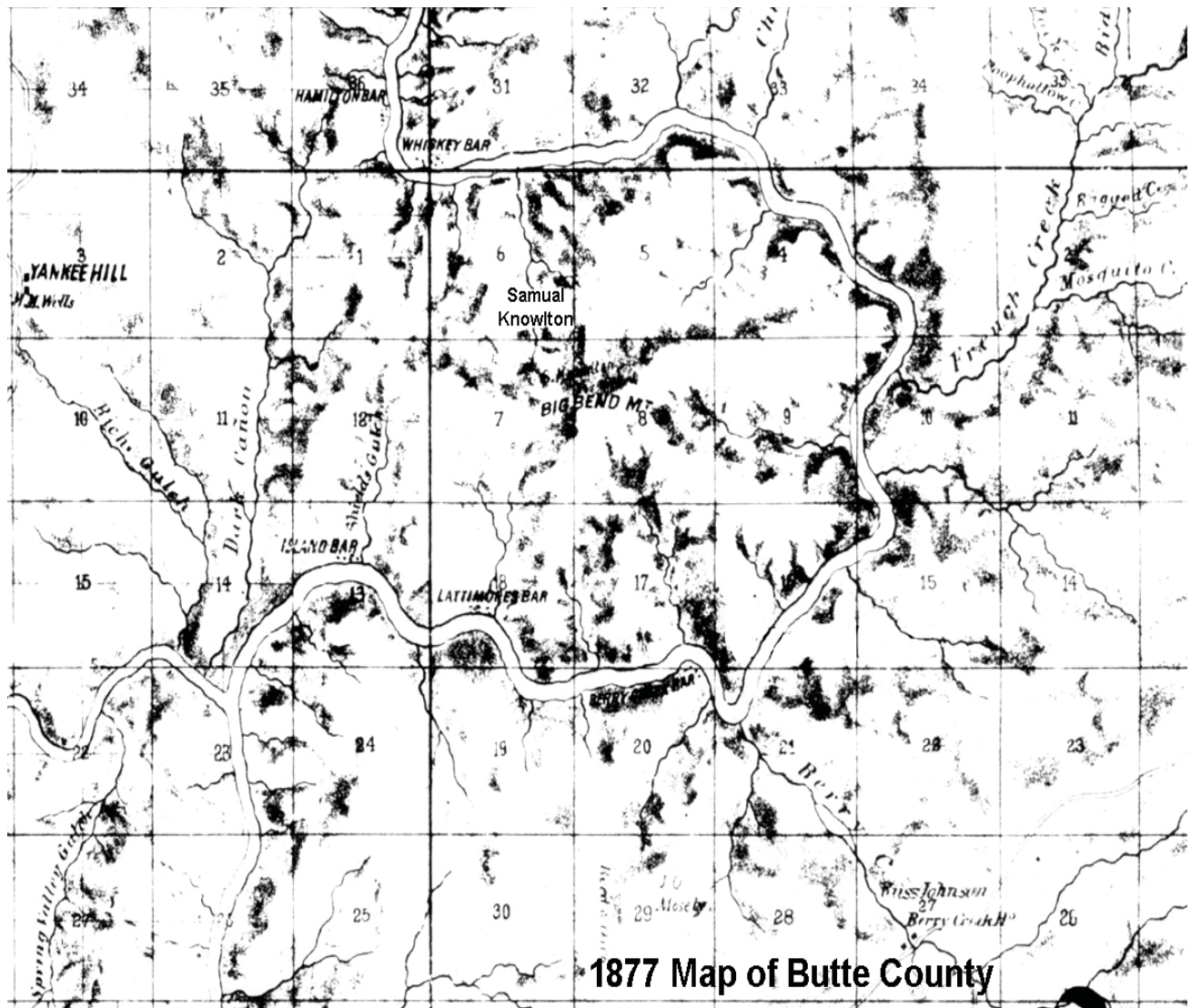


Yohema Clark, George Ransom Clark , Unknown?, Alfred Burr Clark, John Adams Clark

Photo Taken Circa 1899 at Rich Gulch

The First White Land Owners on Big Bend Mountain

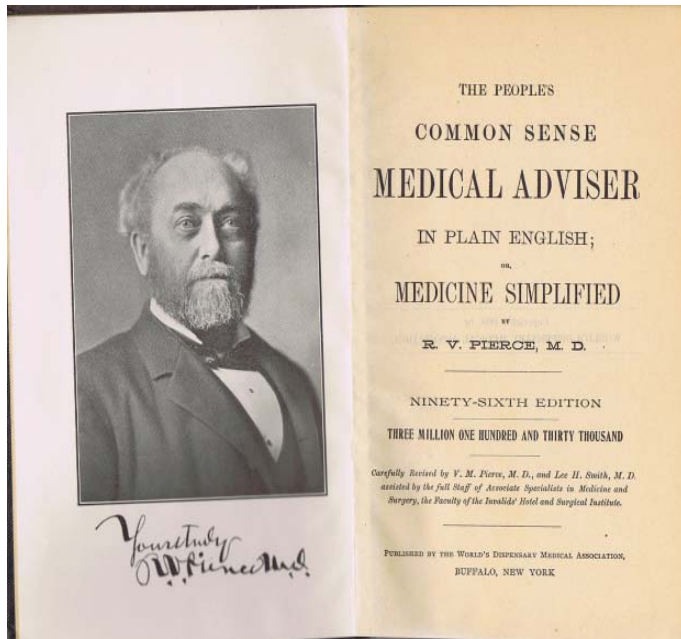
In 1877 the map of Butte County labeled the area above the bend in the Feather River as Big Bend Mountain. The Central Pacific Railroad acquired large chunks of Big Bend land in the 1870's. The first white settler on Big Bend Mountain after the Indians was Sam Knowlton, a native of New Hampshire, he settled on and farmed 160 acres about 1874/75. Prior to that time he tried his hand at mining in the area. He continued to live at Big Bend until his death in 1888. His land Patent was awarded in 1889 after his death to his daughter, Allora Knowlton. By 1880 the Knowlton family had company at Big Bend. Horatio Leggett (father-in-law to Wm Pinkston) was farming 160 acres, David Hall farmed 158 acres and Eli Piper farmed 120 acres.



The Big Bend Tunnel

Over a period of 20 years Frank McLaughlin was involved with several large mining ventures in Butte County. He usually brought in outside capital to help finance grand mining ventures with varying success. In one of his last ventures in Butte County, McLaughlin convinced Thomas Edison to invest in a plan to divert the Feather River with a rock wall a mile long so it was possible to mine the dry river bed. Known as the China Wall the venture was a failure when they discovered the river apparently had been diverted years earlier in a similar effort.

In 1882 McLaughlin convinced a well known New York patent medicine salesman, R.V. Pierce, to invest in a plan to expose the bottom of the Feather River at Big Bend by diverting the water through a tunnel. The plan was to drill a tunnel 2 miles long through the middle of Big Bend Mountain to Dark Canyon. This would allow the water to flow through Big Bend Mountain rather than around the big bend in the Feather River, thereby draining the river.



Founded in 1870 it is estimated by 1900 Dr. Pierce made \$5,000,000 selling patent medicines at \$1.00 per bottle and his Medical Advisor. The company was in business until the 1940's.

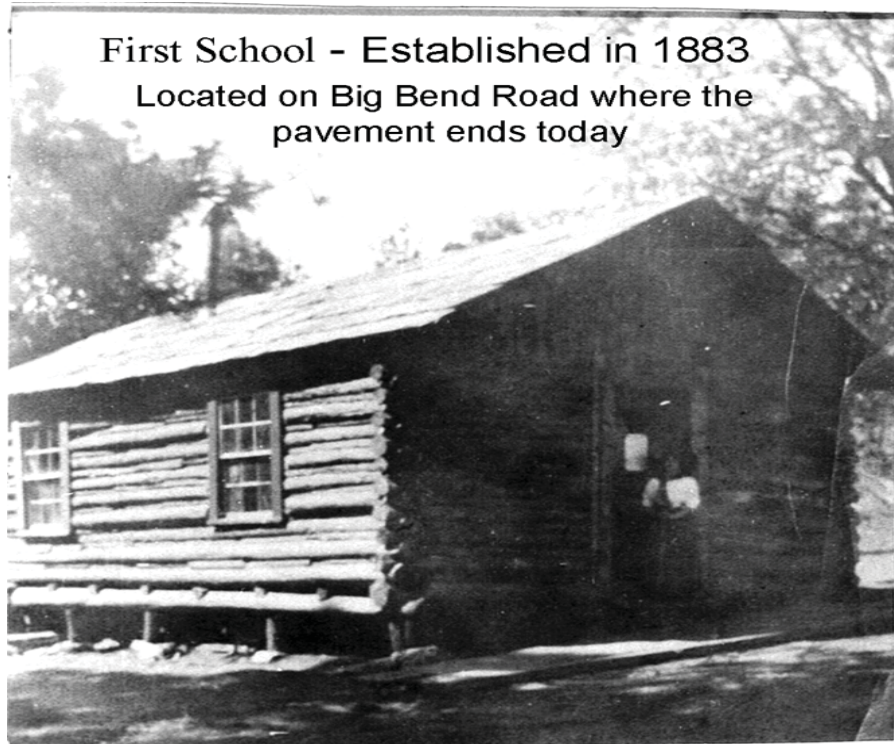


Building the tunnel would employ 100 workers, working around the clock requiring a new road and an electric generating plant be built to support the efforts as well as a lumber mill and stamp mill. The Big Bend Tunnel and Mining Company was formed and numerous mining claims were filed along the river.

Daily Mercury 3-21-1883

THE contract for grading the new road to Big Bend has been let to a company of Chinese. It leaves the Cherokee road about a half a mile beyond the residence of the Smith brothers and goes direct to the head of the Spring Vailey ravine, crossing which it descends down the side of the ridge to West Branch of Feather river. Here a bridge will be constructed by Jeff Van Ness, the company furnishing the material therefor. This crossing is about a half mile above the junction of the West Branch with the North Fork. Thence the grade winds around the southern end of Big Bend mountain to the flat on which the future town of Big Bend will be built, and where the company's office, Superintendent's residence, etc., are at present located. The road shortens the distance from Oroville to that place nine miles, avoiding Cherokee and Yankee Hill altogether. Work will be commenced immediately and but a few months will elapse before it will be open for travel. By this route Sam Knowlton's place can be reached in a distance of about sixteen miles.

The same year the road was built a school district was formed and the Big Bend post office was opened with George E Carman postmaster. The town of Big Bend was on its way! Today the area is referred to by locals as Sample Flat; the origin of the name is unknown.



Big Bend School



Meanwhile the tunnel through the mountain was progressing slowly. By August 1885 the tunnel was 10,000 feet long with 1500 feet to go. In 1885 efforts to promote the area's agriculture were attempted by several of the local farmers.

Pacific Rural Press

[MARCH 14, 1885

AGRICULTURAL NOTES.

CALIFORNIA.

Butte.

MOUNTAIN FARMING.—Big Bend Cor. Oroville *Register*: As an example of the agricultural resources of Butte county and the profits to be made from fruit farming in this county, even in the more elevated mountainous parts, I will give you a few notes, exact facts, from the place of Samuel Knowlton, situated about two miles north of Big Bend, 18 miles north of Oroville in the Sierra Nevada mountains, at an altitude of 2,600 feet. The ranch comprises in all 200 acres, 40 acres being under cultivation; four acres of which are in orchard, four acres in vineyard, the remainder in hay, vegetables and a fine nursery. Apples are the principal fruit, of which only the choicest varieties are grown, viz.: Swans, Spitzenburg, Pearmain, Sweeting, Winesap and Newtown Pippin, the last mentioned being the favorite for late winter use, keeping until the last of February or later. Apples grown on this place are as good as those grown anywhere in the world. The flavor is perfect, the texture fine and the quality excellent. The surrounding country affords a ready and profitable market and many orders are received from Vallejo, Oakland and other places, as these apples are so far superior to any grown in the valleys. Peaches, pears, apricots, cherries, quinces, plums, figs, blackberries and strawberries grow to perfection. Pears and peaches do especially well. A visit to the strawberry patch in spring when the luscious red berries, larger than the largest plums, peep up everywhere through the fresh green leaves, like great brilliant, shining rubies, is truly a sight to tempt the appetite of the gods. The blackberries are large and of excellent quality. The demand for these berries exceeds the supply and always at a good price. Varieties of the red, white and black cherry are grown. Wine grapes do not do so well here on account of the cold, but the Fiher Sagus and some other varieties do well. Citrus fruits have not been tried, as some seasons are most too cold for them. All kinds of vegetables and sorghum grow with little care. The orchard is planted on steep hillsides in a light red soil. Several springs furnish abundant water for irrigating and domestic purposes. The water is cold and delicious.

William Mullen, the brother of Alfred Burr Mullen who owned the Concow Hotel purchased 40 acres at Big Bend and started farming. William Mullen had been in the Concow area since the early 1850's.

Articles about the history of mining on the Big Bend in the early 1850's were printed in the local paper. The large amount of gold at the bottom of the Feather River at Big Bend would make the venture a huge financial success. The project was so grand that it was getting national attention.

In Feb 1886 an article was run by the Scientific American in New York about the tunnel.

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN

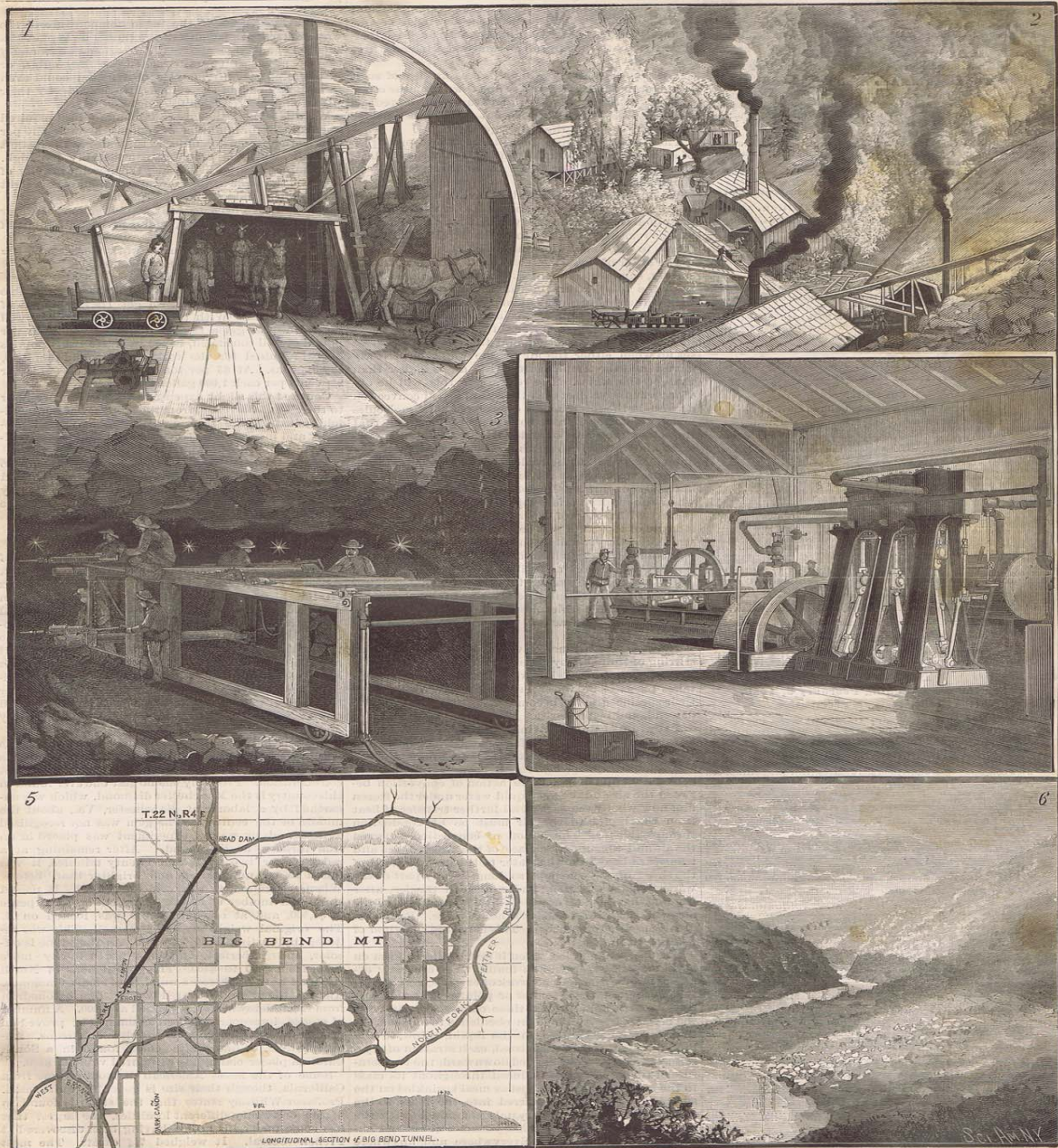
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A WEEKLY JOURNAL OF PRACTICAL INFORMATION, ART, SCIENCE, MECHANICS, CHEMISTRY, AND MANUFACTURES.

Vol. LII. - No. 6. [NEW SERIES.]

NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 6, 1886.

[\$3.20 per Annum. POSTAGE PREPAID.]



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.]

Drilling the tunnel was progressing at about 400 feet per month. When the tunnel broke through at Dark Canyon in 1886, water was run through the tunnel, but the capacity of the tunnel was not enough to handle all the water. It was decided to make the tunnel larger. Originally 9' high x 16' wide, the tunnel was enlarged to 12' high x 16' wide. In Sept 1887 it was announced the work was complete, the tunnel had been widened. The mining operation would begin next spring after the winter rains and pumps and mining equipment were in place. It was estimated 200 miners would be employed when the mining started. The cost to date was more than \$1,000,000.

In Oct 1888 a stamp mill was installed at Big Bend. Meanwhile William Mullen sent an article to the Pacific Rural Press about his successful farming venture.

“Editors Press: Just think of it! Away up here in Butte, at 1800 feet elevation and with no irrigation, I now have green tomatoes, green string beans, green and ripe watermelons, figs on trees just getting ripe, green sorghum and Egyptian corn - second crop from same roots - ready to cut again or turn cows on - Wm Mullen, Big Bend, Dec 2nd”



In the early 1890's there were several mentions in articles about a flume being built at Big Bend to supply water from the Big Bend Tunnel to Butte County. This picture is in the Miriam Library Special Collections at Chico State. Probably taken near Dark Canyon outlet, it is not clear if the flume was ever completed.

The Big Bend Bust!

In Sept 1889, the Big Bend Tunnel and Mining Company declared the venture a bust.

DAILY ALTA CALIFORNIA THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 26 1889.

TWO MILLIONS GONE.

Complete Collapse of the Big Bend Mining Company.

Eastern Investors Sink a Pot of Money in the Feather River Scheme.

There Was Gold in the Bed of the Stream, But the Cost of Removing the Boulders Was Too Great.

BUFFALO, N. Y., September 25th.—One of the largest financial enterprises in which Buffalo speculators ever engaged has practically collapsed and the loss is \$2,000,000. The enterprise was the Big Bend Tunnel and Mining Company, with the principal office in this city and a branch at Big Bend, Butte county, California. The field of operations is at the latter place.

The capital stock of the company is \$20,000,000, of which \$2,000,000 has been paid in and is sunk beyond redemption. The President of the company is Hon. Ray V. Pierce, ex-Congressman and proprietor of a patent medicine concern in this city. Dr. Pierce is the head of the enterprise and owns 60 to 70 per cent of the stock. The shareholders are widely scattered throughout the country.

The Feather river is in Butte county, Cal., and the north fork of the river at the place called Big Bend was considered particularly rich. Five years ago Dr. Pierce's attention was called to these deposits and he organized the Big Bend Tunnel and Mining Company, every shareholder in which confidently expected to become a millionaire. Dr. Pierce's brother-in-law, Dr. L. H. Smith, the treasurer of the company, said last night that the mine was practically a failure. The tunnel constructed to divert the river was a success, but when the river bed dried it was found that the work, so far as getting at the gold deposits was concerned, was only begun. The bed of the river was covered with innumerable boulders, and it was a losing task to secure the gold. One gang of men would strike a rich find, but another would work away at boulders and eat up the profits of the finds. It is hardly probable that anything further will be done in the way of mining, and the only revenue that will be got out of the property will come from the sale of a tract of land, some of which is valuable, including hundreds of acres of good timber.

In the official bulletin announcing the failure of the scheme, Dr. Pierce says: "But after all our efforts, and much as we regret to acknowledge the fact, yet we are quite prepared to admit that at present we see no prospect of realizing our former expectations with respect to these mines."

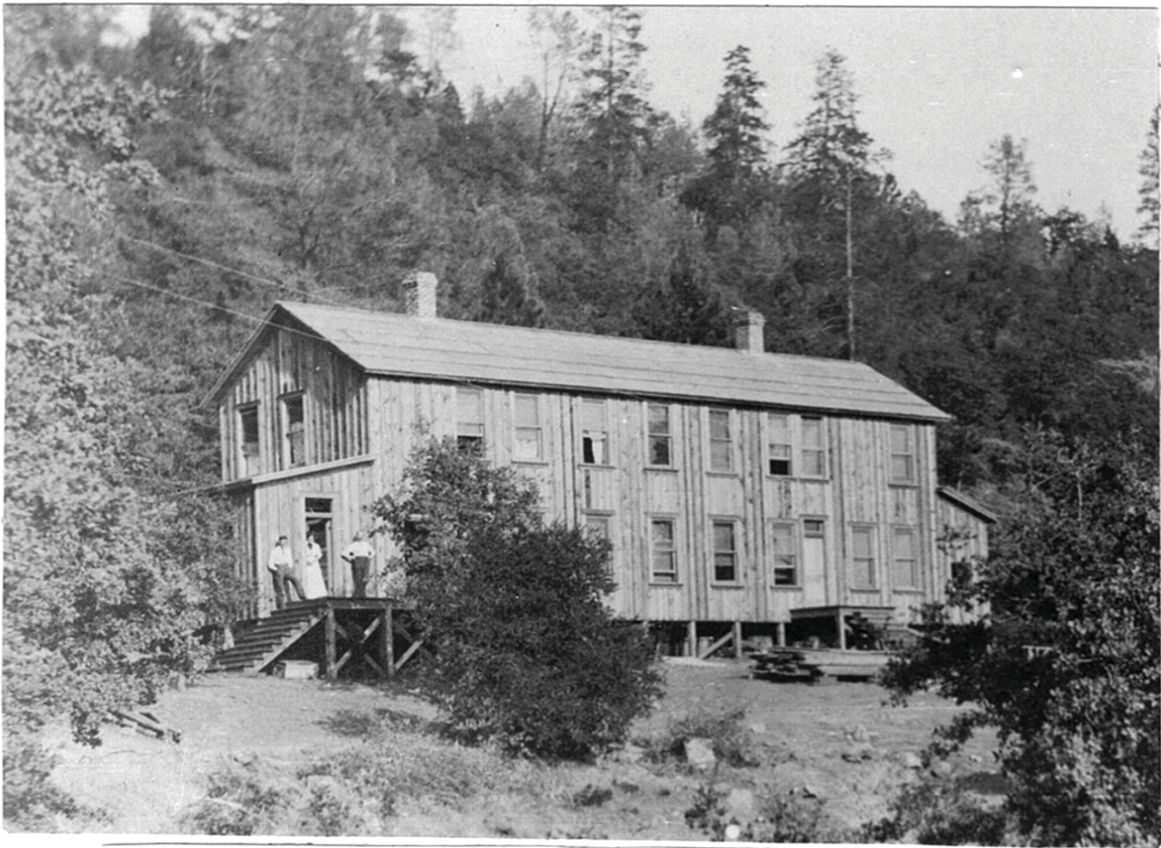
The failure of the tunnel was covered in papers from San Francisco to Los Angeles as well as back east. Frank McLaughlin was not directly involved with the venture by this time. When asked about the failure, he was surprised but stated the tunnel would be a valuable asset in generating electricity. Small local power companies were starting to appear all over and the tunnel could be used to generate significant power.

The Big Bend post office was closed in 1891, the final blow to the town of Big Bend happened in August 1895 when a fire swept over the area destroying nearly all the buildings.

8-8-1895 Oroville Register - Tuesday night a fire occurred at the Big Bend Mine which swept away the place of everything in the way of a building. Not a timber about the place was left standing. There were 8 or 9 buildings in all including a boarding house, bunkhouse and outbuildings. The Secretary's residence and office met the same fate. The office was neatly furnished and the secretary's house was being used to store furniture.

Las Plumas and the Big Bend Power House

In Dec 1904 the tunnel at Big Bend was deeded to the Eureka Power Company. Frank McLaughlin was somehow involved with the transaction. McLaughlin's usual mode of operation was a fee and stock when putting together these deals. He very seldom used his own money to finance a deal. The company purchased the Big Bend tunnel to supply water to the power house they were planning on building at the bottom of Big Bend. Before the power house was built, the company was acquired by the Great Western Power Company in 1907. The great Western Power Company started building a tunnel to connect the water outlet from the old Big Bend Tunnel at Dark Canyon via a new tunnel transferring the water to the new power house site. The building of the plant and tunneling from the Big Bend tunnel at Dark Canyon to the plant site employed 1100 men working in 7 camps around Big Bend; Camp #6 located near Highway Alternate 40, now Dark Canyon Rd included a hospital.



Located at Big Bend near Highway Alternate 40, the Camp #6 Hospital served the 1,100 workers working on the Las Plumas Power Station

When completed in Dec 1908 at a cost of \$12,000,000 the Great Western Power Company power plant at Big Bend would be the largest power plant in the country. In Jan 1909 Great Western agreed to sell power to P.G. & E. for distribution in Sacramento and Oakland. Great Western also started to solicit customers on their own, offering to establish power distribution plants for various cities in California. Great Western would sell the city the power and the city would handle the distribution from the local distribution plant to the end customer.

In May of 1909 Great Western Power Company entered into an agreement with Edison Electric Company in Southern California. At the time Edison Electric was capitalized at \$13,000,000 and Great Western was capitalized at \$50,000,000. Basically they entered into a “do not compete” agreement. At the same time the Vice President of Edison Electric, H.H. Sinclair became General Manager of Great Western Power and relocated to San Francisco.



In 1908 they used an overhead tram to cross the Feather River from the town of Las Plumas to the power house on the opposite bank



Las Plumas Power House 1911

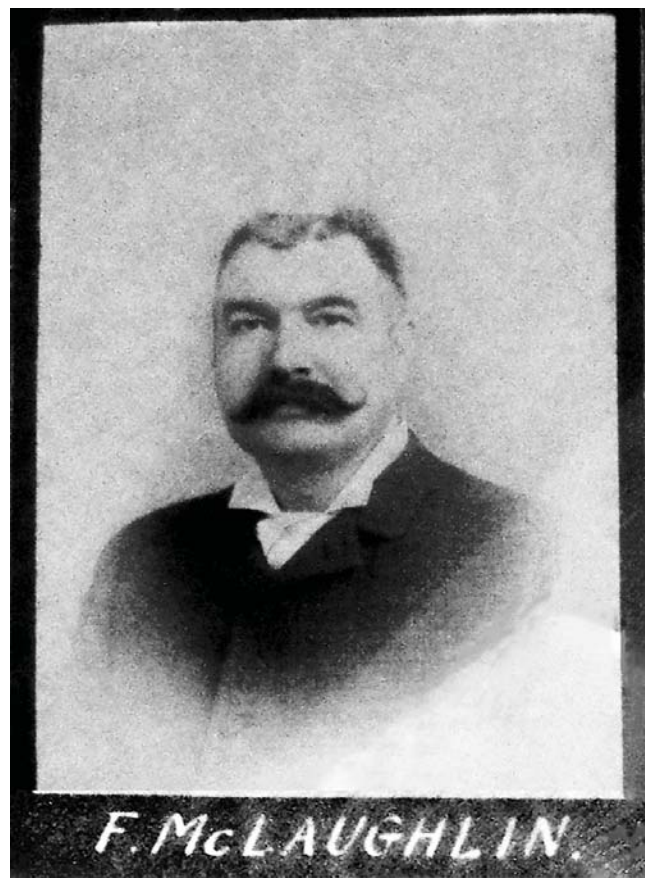
Several investors in the Great Western Power Company were also investors in the Western Pacific Railroad. The Great Western Power Company immediately wanted to expand operations. They acquired land at Big Meadows and started building a dam to create Lake Almanor to supply more water to Big Bend. The capacity of the Las Plumas Power plant was expanded from 60,000 horsepower to 120,000 horsepower.

Frank McLaughlin Commits Suicide

In 1895 after the failure of the China Wall project with Thomas Edison on the Feather River, Frank McLaughlin announced he was divesting himself from his Butte County projects. He would move to Santa Cruz and focus on the development of his citrus crops. At the time he was involved with the reopening of several old mining projects in the county, including the Banner Mine in Oregon Gulch and the Rock Creek mine in Oregon City. Technology had developed to the point that mines could be dug much deeper in search of gold.

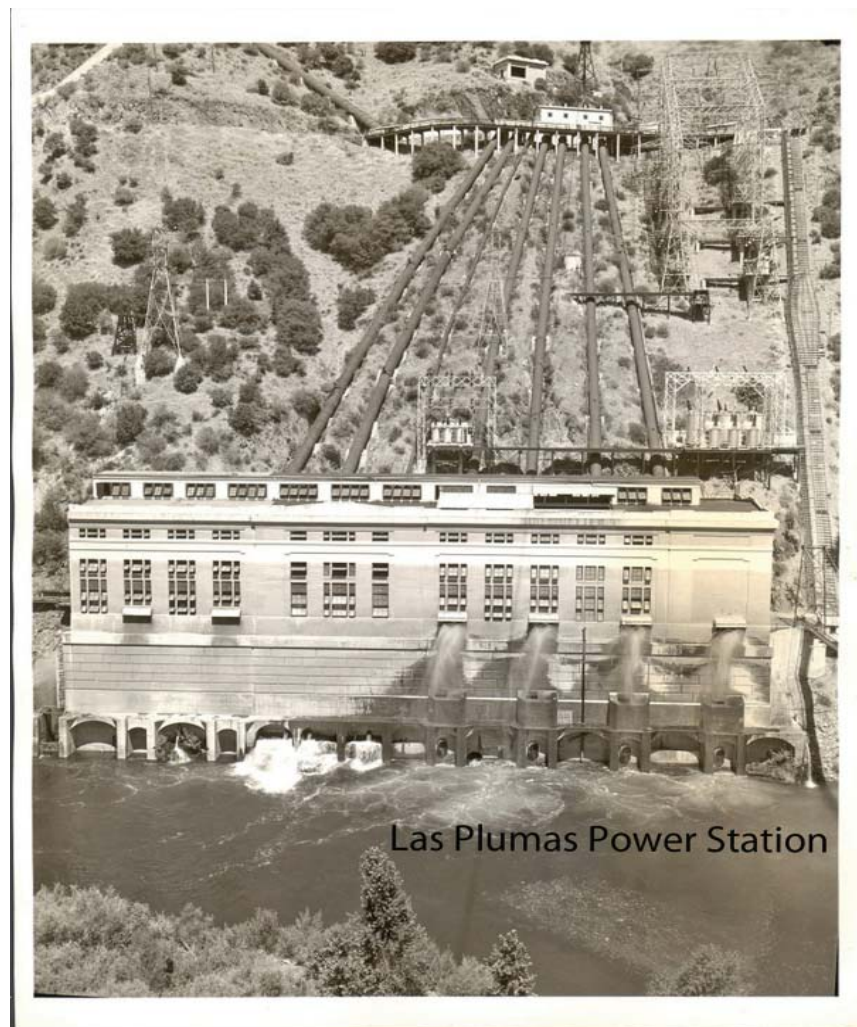
McLaughlin was living at his mansion in Santa Cruz in 1910 when he shot his stepdaughter in her sleep and poisoned himself. There were detailed instructions left for his attorney about what to do with their bodies and the family dog.

His wife had died several years earlier and his daughter told friends he was despondent. There was also speculation that his high life style had left him in financial difficulties. His personal secretary, after his death, stated they were to be married and he owed her \$16,000 she had loaned him. It was reported in the papers that McLaughlin received \$22,000 in fees for his part in selling the Big Bend Tunnel for \$500,000 and also some stock in the power company. After the purchase of the initial buyer by Great Western Power, the stock was then in the Great Western Power Company. He sold the stock in Great Western Power several years before his death for pennies, at the time of his death that stock was worth \$180,000. The house in Santa Cruz was sold at auction for \$17,921. Today it is a private residence.



Great Western Power and P.G. & E. - Partners and Foes

In 1911 Great Western Power purchased 800 acres of land in Big Meadows from Annie Bidwell, the price was \$30,000. The Lake Amador Dam was completed in 1914 which supplied more water to the Big Bend power plant. By this time P.G. & E. and Great Western Power had entered into an expansion race, each trying to outgrow the other. Both companies were selling bonds to raise extra cash. When Great Western made a sale of bonds, P.G. & E. would make a larger sale. In 1911 PG & E announced they were going to sell \$150,000,000 in bonds, \$50,000,000 to retire old bonds and \$90,000,000 for new projects. In 1911 rumors also started about a possible merger between P.G. & E. and Great Western Power, but they never materialized. In 1912 P.G. & E. accused Great Western Power of infringing on their territories; Great Western Power had announced they were going to lay cable to San Francisco. In 1916 Great Western Power made plans to construct another power plant on the North Fork of the Feather River at a cost of \$10,000,000. With the start of WWI the government was looking for a way to conserve fuel during the war effort, congress held several meetings on the subject. Both the railroads and power companies were a concern. In 1918 an agreement was reached for three California power companies to operate as one in order to conserve fuel and make the operations more efficient.



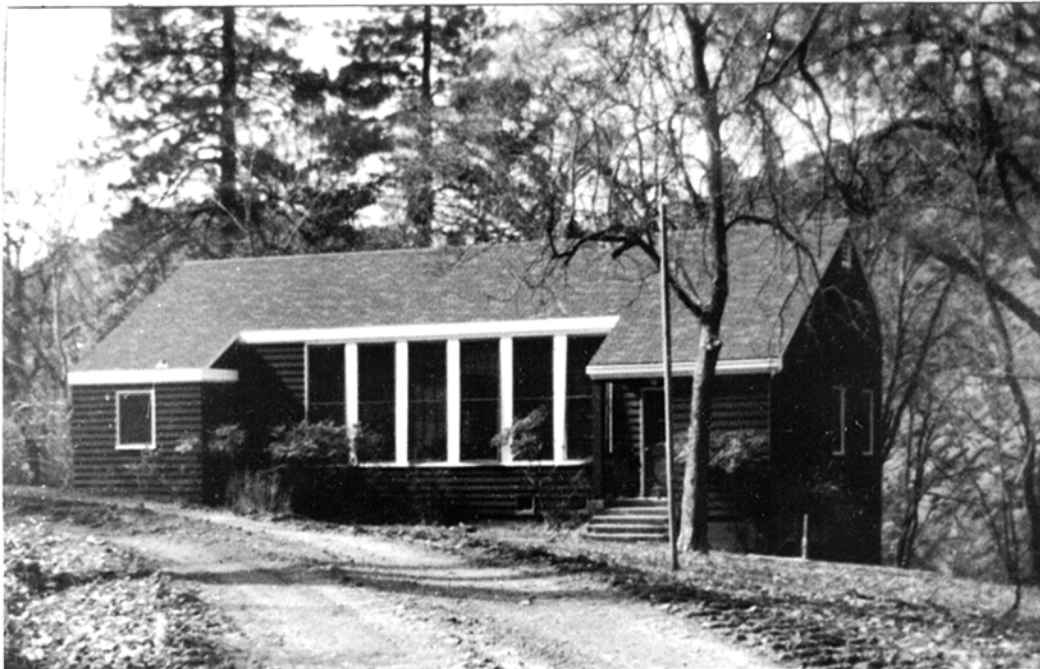
Great Western Power, P.G. & E. as well as the Sierra and San Francisco Power Company participated. P.G. & E. would operate the facilities for all the companies but the assets would remain the property of the individual companies. During the earlier period of rapid expansion and huge bond sales P.G. & E. founders started to lose control of the company and California was gaining a larger role in the company.

The State was concerned about the fierce competition and the effects on costs to their customers. It was only a matter of time before the assets of the Great Western Power Company would be acquired by P.G. & E.

Las Plumas, the Town

Early on there was a need for housing for the employees at the power plant. The town of Las Plumas developed across the river from the power house. In the beginning a gondola was used to transport employees to the power house. Later a suspension bridge was built to cross from the town to the power plant. A Post office was established in 1908 but ceased operations from 1909 until 1912 when it was reopened. The Las Plumas School was built in 1940. The school district name was changed to Las Plumas in 1945. The town was abandoned when the Las Plumas power house was abandoned in 1967. Today when Lake Oroville is low you can see some of the concrete footings for the old homes.

Las Plumas School was built in 1940, the Big Bend School District was renamed the Las Plumas School District in 1945



The Las Plumas School was located across the North Fork from Big Bend students from Big Bend had to cross the suspension bridge to go to school

Mining on Top of Big Bend

Exploring for gold on top of Big Bend was always a pastime, many of the first settlers were previously gold miners. In 1893 William Pinkston operated the Morning Star Mine on the property he inherited from his father-in-law, Horatio Leggett. The mine was visited in June 1895 and written up in the Mining and Scientific Press. It is not known how successful the mine was but the mine was reopened in 1931 by Mike Pinkston.

Further Notes on the Gold Ores of California.

Written by H. W. TURNER.

Some brief notes were published in the *American Journal of Science* on the gold ores of California in June, 1894, and the following may be considered as an appendix to that article:

Gold in Barite.—During the past summer the writer examined some gold veins on Big Bend mountain, in Butte county, California, and found that one of them was of an unusual character. The vein is known as the Pinkstown ledge. It is located about a half-mile due south of the highest point of Big Bend mountain (Bidwell Bar atlas sheet). The ledge strikes N. 13° W. and dips at a high angle (about 80°). It is from two to three feet wide where best exposed at the north end, and is composed of a soft, heavy mineral, some of which is coarsely crystalline, with a granular structure, but most of it is finer grained with a schistose arrangement of the granules. No single crystals of the minerals were noted having a greater maximum diameter than five-eighths of an inch. Some of them show plainly a characteristic cleavage. Dr. Hillebrand made a chemical examination of this soft mineral and reported it to be barite. Three sections of the barite were examined microscopically, and these show that when fresh there is scarcely any impurity in the mineral, and in fact no other substance was noted except scattered minute reddish opaque grains, which, as seen under the microscope, are reddish-yellow by reflected light, without metallic luster. They may be limonite. Many of the barite grains show distinct cleavages, which appear in the thin sections to intersect at nearly right angles. A tendency to a radical structure like that of epidote was noted at several points. The relief of the barite is rather high. A sample was examined for gold by Dr. Stokes, who reported that "the barite contains gold but too small in amount to be determined in the wet way." There is said, however, to be enough gold in the deposit to pay to work, and the writer understood that the owner of the ledge obtained gold from it by grinding up the ore in a hand mortar and panning it.

A considerable part of Big Bend mountain, as exposed along the road from the bridge over the west branch of the north fork of the Feather river to the abandoned village of Big Bend, is made up of clay slates, probably Paleozoic in age, with layers of greenstone schists, representing original augitic tuffs. The rocks along the east and south base of the mountain, as seen along the river (the north Fork of the Feather), are almost entirely greenstones, with one or two layers of sedimentary mica schists. These greenstones are largely amphibolitic rocks representing original surface lavas and tuffs, probably augitic porphyrites, but now containing little or no augite. The exact nature of the schist enclosing the barite vein was not determined. The south extension of the Pinkstown ledge, owned by Clarke, was examined, but no barite was found, the rock on the dump being a white, fine-grained schist, with a greasy feel. This, as seen in this section, is composed chiefly of minute, brightly polarizing fibers, perhaps talc, with numerous minute cubes of pyrite, arranged in rows.

The Surcease Mine at Big Bend

In 1913 Steadman and Moore purchased the Knowlton property from Allora Knowlton, by that time amounting to 440 acres. In 1916 Moses Kinkaid, a Congressman from Nebraska, purchased an adjoining 160 acres from the Central Pacific Railroad for \$6,000. By 1913 Great Western Power; the founders of the power house at Big Bend/Las Plumas also acquired land from the Central Pacific Railroad. In May of 1916 John Clark received a letter from Congressman Kinkaid in response to a letter from Clark about buying Kinkaid's property at Big Bend. The Senator responded with the following:

"I think you understand the property better than any third person" "But as I understood you, your desire is to secure an option to purchase with lease to operate (a mine). On such a basis I will make you a price of \$50,000 but with \$10,000 paid in cash before taking possession with large enough installments to follow to more than equal the profits of the operation. I also offer you that I will accept \$40,000 in cash for the property allowing you to go and examine it carefully to ascertain its value. I should state I am putting in a new concentrator and have let the contract for the cyaniding of the tailings now in the dump and the cyaniding plant is to belong to me when the work is done three or four months hence."

Purchasing the cyaniding plant would have been at an additional cost to John Clark. (Kinkaid brought in only enough equipment to test sample the mine, including a single stamp mill.) John Clark did not purchase the property but he is considered by many to be the original founder of the mining site. Not only had his father mined on the Feather River at Island Bar in 1859 but John's Uncles, Marvin Clark, Parker Clark and Cousin Claude Park mined above Huffs Bar in 1899. John appears to have worked on the claim as well. In 1910 John Clark had his own claim at Big Bend, the Eureka Claim, so he was familiar with the area.

Moses Kinkaid continued to look for investors or individuals to lease or purchase his mining site.

Moses Pierce Kinkaid 1856 - 1922
Congressman from Nebraska
purchased Surcease Mine site, Big Bend
1916



John Clark

Arilee Clark

circa 1901

The Goldfield Consolidated Mines Exploration Company

In Feb 1917 Thomas B. Pheby, a lawyer from San Francisco approached Moses Kinkaid about his land. Kinkaid sold the land to Pheby for \$73,000, taking a portion of his share in stock in the Goldfield Consolidated Mines Exploration Company. The Company was started by Pheby and Kinkaid. In Nov 1917 Pheby on his own acquired land adjacent to the mine owned by Steadman and Moore. Basically all the land Northwest of Big Bend Mountain was now in private hands and available for mining. It appears that at this time George Moak became involved with the Surcease mining operation. In 1919 the mining operation was surveyed for possible purchase. James Reno made an assessment for the purchaser. Reno had been in Mexico in 1913 working in the mines. It is not clear who the potential purchaser was as their name is not mentioned in the report.

In 1922 the Goldfield Consolidated Mines Exploration Company decided to sell the mine to Jim Plunkett, the Managing Director of the Gruss Mining Company for \$140,000. The probable reason for selling was the requirement for more capital in order to make the mine profitable. The arrangement was the mine was to be worked by the Gruss Mining Company starting as soon as possible and 25% of the net proceeds would be applied to the sale price each month. The mine had to be operated at least 150 shifts of 8 hours each in every calendar period. If the terms were not met, it would be considered a default on the deal. This would force the buyer to make significant investments in the mining operation. Gruss Mining Company moved equipment to the mine from a mine they were closing down in Plumas County. It appears the deal was never completed because the Goldfield Consolidated Mines Exploration Company was looking for another buyer in 1928.

James Wilson Reno leases the Surcease Mine.

In 1928 James Wilson Reno leased the Surcease mining rights at Big Bend. Reno was a mining Lead in Inyo County. He was the same person who had done an assessment in 1919. Reno brought in his brother Charles Reno to run the mine. In Dec 1917 Charles Reno's wife was killed when her dress got caught in a conveyor belt at the mine office. The drive belt came up through the floor of the mining office where it was attached to a motor. She was alone at the time in the office while the acting supervisor was attending to business elsewhere. Her Husband had been asleep that day as he worked the night shift. Help came when they heard Mrs. Reno's screams. Mrs. Reno died near Pentz while she was being taken to the Oroville hospital by George Moak.

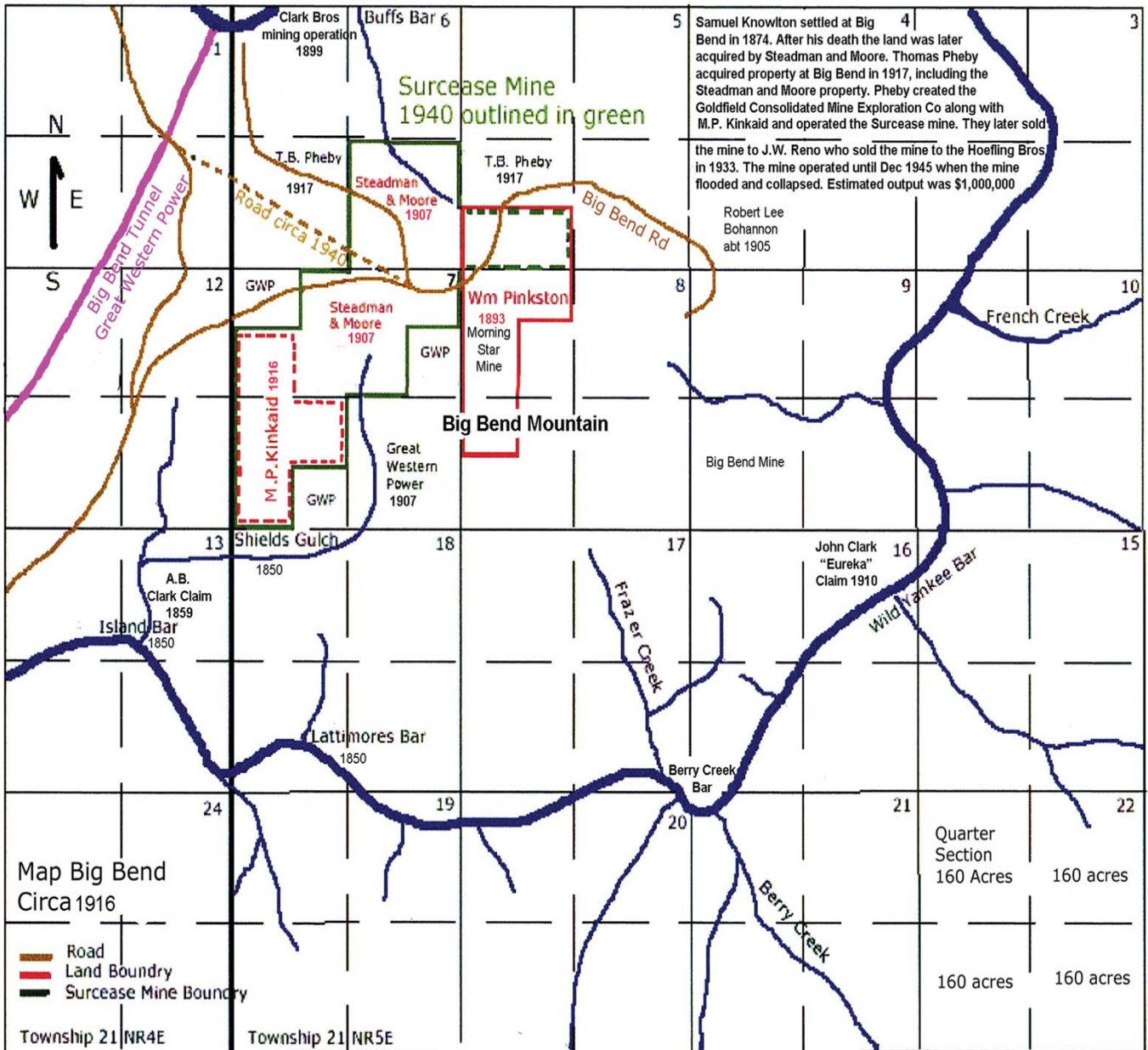
In May 1928 James Reno turned around and leased the mining rights to George Brannen who took in two partners, Fred Elder and Arthur L. Williams. They agreed to work for \$30.00 per month wages in exchange for 1/3 interest each in the profits. The Goldfield Consolidated Mines Exploration Company still owned the land but was no longer involved with the operation except for whatever lease money and portion of the profits they received from its operation.



Surcease Mine circa 1922

Tena Clark and Rachael Casner
Tena was John Clark's daughter

Note the power lines; an agreement was made with the Great Western Power Company to run lines to the mine around 1920. It was one of the few places at Big Bend with power. The mine shaft is in the shade of the trees. Big Bend was heavily forested at the time which obscured the location. This picture and the picture of the Surcease Mine crew as well as the Moses Kinkaid letter to John Clark are courtesy of JoAnne Bond. JoAnne was adopted by John Clark's daughter Tena, shown here and Tena's husband Alfred Leslie. JoAnne has done extensive research on the Clark family which she has shared with several historical societies and the Meriam Library at Chico State.



The Moak Family Farm

George Moak apparently worked for Thomas Pheby, while living at the old Knowlton place at Big Bend. In Nov 1927 Thomas Pheby sold George Moak 360 acres of the Steadman and Moore property at Big Bend that had formerly belonged to Samuel Knowlton including the old house across from Wm Pinkston's place. George Moak had been living on the land for some time previously while working at the nearby mining operations. At the time of the sale to George Moak and registration with the County Clerk Pheby indicated the sales agreement had been in place since 1917, when Pheby first acquired the property. More than likely the sale was finalized in 1927 because Pheby was getting ready to sell all his holdings along with his interest in the Goldfield Consolidated Mines Exploration Company to James Reno. The sale price to George Moak was \$2187 for the 360 acres with a stipulation that the mineral rights to the property only extended down 100 feet. This reserved the right for the Surcease mining operation to tunnel under the Moak property. Years later the family would acquire the mineral rights.

James Reno Buys the Mine Property.

In Dec 1929 Reno purchased 2/3 interest in the mine property for \$500. At the same time he purchased the remaining land adjacent to the mine itself and the associated mineral rights for \$1.00. This points to the fact that up to this time the mine was not profitable, and 1/3 of the land owned by the mining concern was not suitable for mining. The Goldfield Consolidated Mines Exploration Company was done with the property. In Mar 1931 Reno prepared to sell the mine but he had to clear up the title first. Because of all the past transactions, Reno was required to place a notice in a county newspaper stating that anyone who protested his ownership should appear before Judge H D Gregory. The ad ran in the Gridley Herald from Dec 1931 thru Jan 1932. The possible defendants named were Thomas Pheby, Arthur L Williams, Moses Kinkaid and George Moak. There apparently was no contest and Reno was awarded full ownership by the judge.

James Reno Sells the Mine to the Hoefling Brothers

John Hoefling, Ambrose Hoefling and Phillip Hoefling were all brothers and sons of Johan and Katherine Hoefling of Chico. Johan immigrated to this country from Germany in 1882. He operated a farm in Chico and later in Sacramento. The brothers leased the mine with a right to purchase in 1933. The three brothers formed a corporation in Sept 1936 specifically for mining purposes. They then went out and purchased the mine property at Big Bend, and later they also purchased the Michael Wells property, 240 acres at Yankee Hill. In the late 1930's they also purchased the Venus Mine property at Yankee Hill.

Their primary efforts were with the Surcease Mine. John and Ambrose Hoefling were the working partners at the mine. By 1940 the mine employed 28 people, including George Moak. There were two active veins, the original Surcease vein and the Bunker Hill vein. The Bunker Hill vein was the most profitable. The Hoefling Brothers had made significant investments in the mine. William Messner, the mine Superintendent was paid \$2280 plus a bonus of \$220 for 1940.



Surcease Mine Crew abt 1940

Back Row: ? , ? , Bill Messner, ? , ? , Gus Niccoli-Tunnel Sup, John Hoefling-Owner, Al Jones

2nd Row: Charlie Morton, Bill Osborn, Johnny Laughlin, ? , ? , McClosky, Al Leslie, George Moak

3rd Row: Jack, McGuiarie, Al Nobbs, Allan Upton, ? , Ambrose Hoefling-Owner, Enos Brown, Dell Wright

Front Row: Leonard Beebe, ? , ? , Emil Wernsman, Bob Newman

Surcease Mine and World War II

With the breakout of World War II, the mining needs of the country dramatically changed. Material to make war supplies, ships, planes, etc was in high demand. Ironically gold was not a metal in short supply, the country was still on the gold standard and the Treasury Department had large amounts of gold stockpiled. But miners were needed for other metals; zinc, copper and tungsten were sorely needed. The Federal Government granted draft deferments to miners of the materials needed, but gold was not one of them. In order to encourage mining of these other materials, gold miners were not considered draft exempt. Later the government would shut down small gold mines that were not highly profitable in order to free up manpower for the war effort.

On June 6, 1941 the Hoefling Brothers wrote the Metals Reserve Corporation at Washington D.C. stating they were looking into switching their mining operations to the production of tungsten. They were inquiring about what returns they could expect so they could measure the risk of developing the new mining venture. They immediately received a reply on June 12th. The Government wanted to know more details about their operation.

They responded they had two mining shafts currently in operation, the Surcease shaft or shaft #1 and the Bunker Hill Shaft, shaft #4. They felt the Bunker Hill Shaft had more potential for developing materials for the war effort. The shaft would have to be taken down another 125 feet or so to be productive. They had experienced some issues with water at its current depth but they felt they were manageable. The mine management worked up two proposals to expand the operation. The most ambitious required a \$100,000 investment by the Hoefling Brothers. The final decision was to go with a plan requiring a \$30,000 investment. Financials submitted to the government for the Bunker Hill shaft showed costs for the previous period from May 1938 to December 1941 to be \$214,915.92 plus \$14,800 in development costs. During that same period 29,007 tons of ore realized \$271,412.20 for a net profit of \$41,696.28 or \$2,316.46 per month over 18 months, a return of 18%. The mine was converted and the shaft at Bunker Hill was sunk deeper. The Hoefling brothers set up a bonus plan for the employees based on profitability.

The Surcease Mine Shuts Down

On Jan 10, 1946, the mine Superintendent William Messner filed the following report.

During December (1945), movement of ground around the shaft became apparent. Inspection of the workings was made by the California Division of Industrial Safety on December 18. Following this inspection, production ceased while requirements of the division inspector were being met. During this period, heavy rainfall persisted and records from the nearest U.S. weather station indicate 21 inches of rainfall in the 10-day period, December 18-28. Efforts to continue with mining with it filling (with water) from the surface were fruitless under these adverse conditions and an additional pump was installed in an attempt to keep the mine unwatered. On December 28, after some warning, the mine workings settled. All men were on the surface at the time and no personal injury resulted. A subsequent inspection by the Division of Industrial Safety resulted in an order denying any employee entry through the shaft for any purpose. A substantial amount of pipe, electrical cable, hoses, two water pumps, and a double drum tigger and scraper were lost in the mine.

Five hundred and ninety tons of ore were hauled from the mine to (the) mill during December. Two hundred sixty-four tons of zinc concentrate and 53 tons of copper concentrate were produced during the month. Cleaning out bins and various mill tanks will result in some further production – possibly 60 tons of zinc concentrate and 25 tons of copper concentrate.

	Assays		Recoveries	
	Zinc %	Copper %	Zinc %	Copper %
Mill heads	20.1	2.8	100.0	100.0
Zinc concentrate	49.0	2.6	88.2	33.6
Copper concentrate	11.2	19.6	4.1	50.8
Mill tails	2.7	.89	7.7	15.6

Respectfully submitted by Wm. E. Messner, Superintendent

Afterward there were further talks of opening the Surcease Mine as a gold mine again but it appears to not have happened, probably because of the flooding issues. The mine had reached a depth of approximately 600 feet. In 1947 there were also discussions about selling the timber from around the mine site but that also appears to not have happened.

The Mine Goes Dormant

The Hoefling Brothers let the mine go dormant and hired George Moak's son Lyman Moak as caretaker for the property. There were five homes on the mine property used by the previous management for housing as well as a mine office. Lyman Moak and his new bride La Roe Moak moved into one of the homes. Their three children, Pete Moak, John Moak and George Moak were all born while the family lived on the Surcease Mine property.

Hoefling Brothers Reorganize and Sell Some Assets

In Sept 1947 John, Ambrose and Philip Hoefling reorganize and move assets around. They moved all the assets associated with the Surcease Mine under the Surcease Mine Corporation, apparently setting it up for sale. The other assets owned by the brothers are transferred to a new corporation owned by the three brothers and their wives. These assets include the old Wells property at Yankee Hill, the Venus Gold Mine at Yankee Hill and property along Concow Road.

In April 1948 the brothers sold 267 acres to J.D. Crain across from Deadwood Road. That same month they sold Ralph Miller 160 acres, part of which is now known as Miller Peak. In Aug 1848 they sold Wm Robinson 400 acres adjacent the Miller property. In Jan 1950 they sold Alvin (Skeet) and Florence Smith 236 acres, the former Wells property at Yankee Hill, including the old school, the hotel, the store and several cabins located on the property. Originally the old Wells property did not include the mineral rights on the land. The Smith's acquired those rights from the Hoefling's in 1958.

Tobe Moak Buys the Surcease Mine Property

In Nov 1956 the Surcease Mine Corporation sold the mine and its assets to Tobe Moak, the son of George Moak and the brother of Lyman Moak who was acting as caretaker on the property. The deed included all buildings on the property as well as 100,000 gallons of water rights per day on the Maple Springs. Tobe agreed to pay \$50,000 for the land, over 1,000 acres, and took out a mortgage with Bank of America for \$25,000. Tobe Moak also acquired the mineral rights under the Moak Ranch which he transferred back to the family. Tobe Moak was a logger by trade, he never worked the mines on the property, but he logged the land until he sold it to Ralph and Lillian Tracy in Dec 1965. The Tracy's sometime later subdivided the property and proceeded to sell it off.



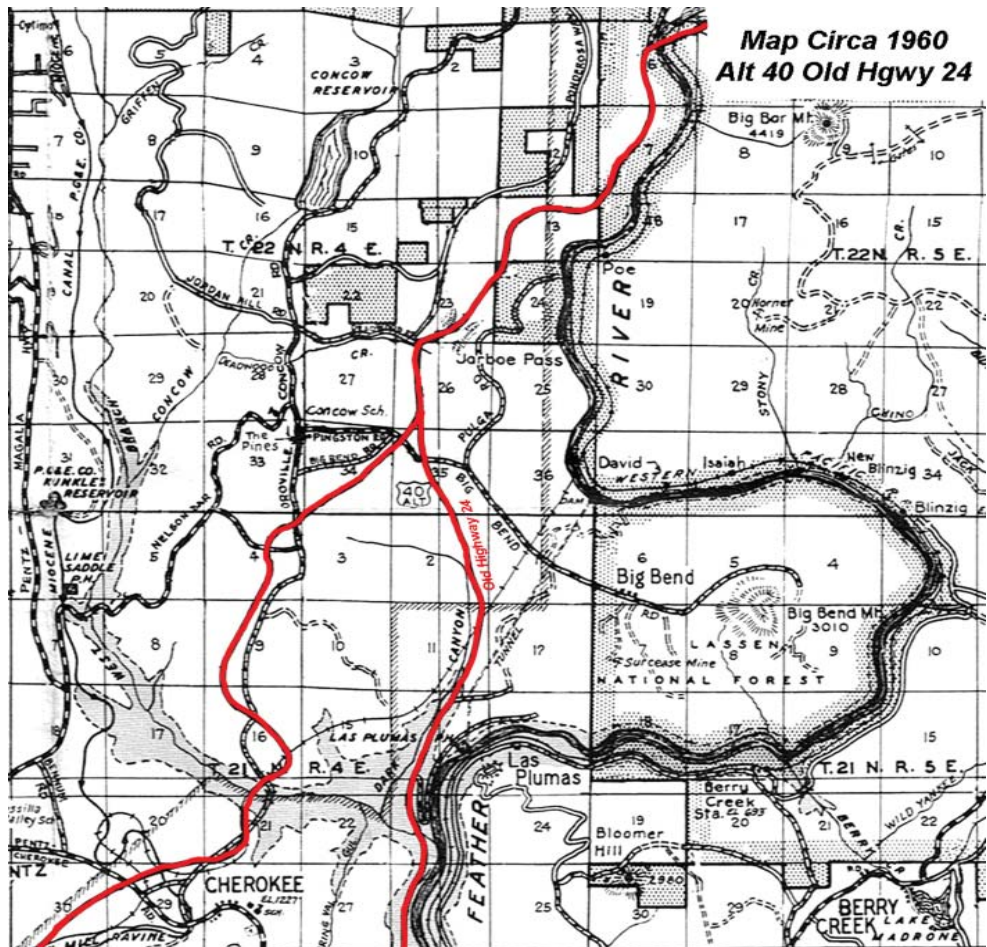
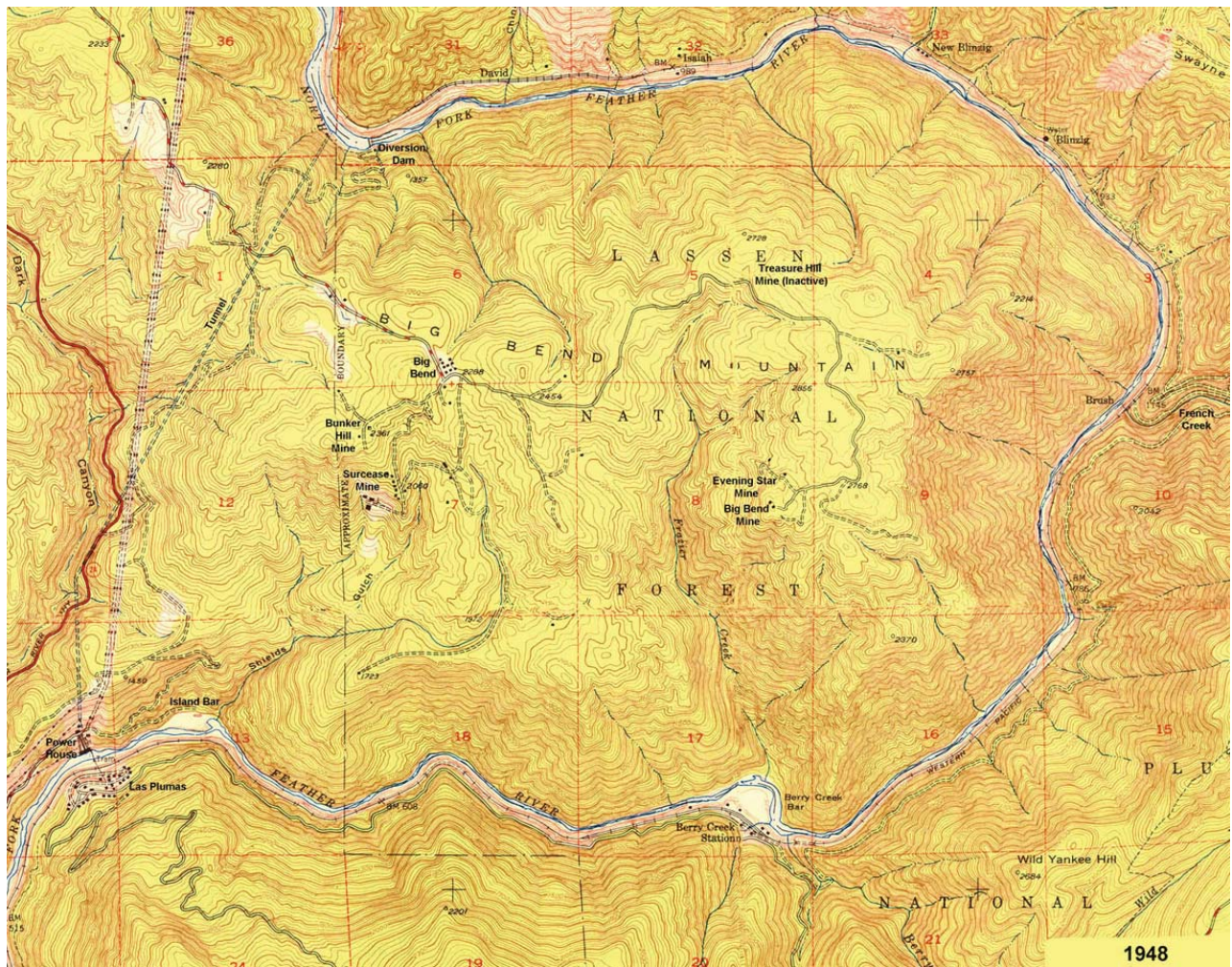
**Moak Family Circa 1952 L to R
John, Hulda in front, Mary Ellen, Nettie, George,
Tobe and Lyman**

**The George Moak
Family at their 50th
wedding anniversary**

Photo Courtesy of La Roe Moak, Lyman's wife and the Moak family

Big Bend Returns to a Quiet, Sleepy Community

With the sale of the Surcease Mine property and the closure of the Las Plumas Power house in 1967, Big Bend became a quiet community. Anyone visiting the area now would not see a trace of the area's vibrant past. More money was invested at Big Bend than was ever invested at Cherokee. But its past has become a story that only a few people are aware of. The Moak family still owns the family ranch. Their extensive knowledge of the area's history always makes for interesting stories that they are always willing to graciously share, all you have to do is ask!



YHHS Happenings

Repairing the roof and adding gutters - We power washed/painted the building and repaired the porch roof last year at a cost of \$4,000 and we are going to add gutters to the sides of the building this year to avoid further roof damage. Your membership helps fund these efforts. We will also have a fundraiser in June to help with the effort, see flyer.

Yankee Hill Historical Society Web Page - You can visit our web page at www.yankeehillhistory.com. The web page has copies of older news letters as PDF files you can download or read on line.

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