



Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation

December Newsletter, 2019

We, the members of the Museum Committee of the SCCBF, hope that you have enjoyed the local family histories and historically oriented articles of the past few months. The future of the SCCBF newsletter will reflect not only events and progress of the museum itself, but will update you on our efforts to collect oral histories and acquire artifacts important to Amador County history. We'll include further exploration into local families' histories as well as interesting buildings, organizations, and events in the history of our City and County.

1850's A Gold Rush Christmas

Christmas during the Gold Rush was a much more homemade feast and party oriented celebration as opposed to the commercialized shopping extravaganza we see today.

Miners in the early days were far removed from home and loved ones, and the Christmas days (there were few calendars, so the date was often hazy and celebrations sometimes lasted several days) were a time to work less, write letters, and reflect longingly on home life. Realize too that in the early days of placer mining, the winter months with increased water availability were eagerly anticipated. Days off were precious and few and the Christmas holiday was universally observed.

The population of the camps was overwhelmingly male and under the age of 50. This, however, did not dampen the spirit of a good fandango. Miners selected to be "women" tied neckerchiefs around an arm or hat and enjoyed the festivities from the female point of view. Must have been a sight - rough hewn bearded miners high stepping around the dance floor to the music supplied by whoever was sober enough to hold an instrument! Even hats were doffed and chairs pulled out for the "girls".



A California Miner's Dance.

Food was the centerpiece of any celebration, and anyone who could actually cook was the "belle of the ball". Mason noted in his "History of Amador County" that Christmas dinner of 1852 was to be remembered.

"On Christmas Day, 1852, a company of miners got up a big dinner. They put a fine, large hawk in the center of a dutch oven, about 20 quails around it, and around them potatoes. Some slices of salt pork on the hawk and the quails seasoned the two birds and tempered the upper heat of the oven. The hawk was pronounced the best of all."

Gift giving became popular about the mid-1800's due to the

popularity at the Victorian Royal Court. The Royal Court also popularized the Christmas tree after one was given to Queen Victoria as a gift from her husband. In early mining camps, trees were installed in some local gathering place - post office, school, church, or someone's large tent, and hung with hand made small gifts. Care was taken to see that no one was left out. Jokes were popular, and bachelors frequently received baby dolls or bonnets.

On the whole, Christmas celebrations were eagerly attended and were a real bright spot in an otherwise tedious existence filled day after day with back breaking hard labor and danger from wild animals and cave-ins.



As one fellow wrote in 1853 of the Christmas spree at Fort John (a former settlement four miles north of Volcano in Amador County) *"it was a real double cow tird smasher!"* Well Said!

Christmas Songs During the Gold Rush

- *Joy To The World* - 1719
- *God Rest You Merry Gentlemen* - 1760
- *The First Noel* - 1823
- *I Saw Three Ships* - 1833

- *O Holy Night* - 1847
- *It Came Upon A Midnight Clear* - 1849
- *Here We Come A-Wassailing* - 1850



Merry Christmas to All and a Very Happy New Year

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