

Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation

April Newsletter, 2021

Green Gold - Lumber in Sutter Creek



Today, living in or visiting any of our gold rush towns in Amador County conjures up images of '49ers panning the creeks. Hard-rock miners descending in skips to depths of nearly a mile also extracted vast quantities of gold from mother earth. In an area famous for mineral wealth, it's easy to overlook the fact that it was our lumber that supported those mines and lumber was the reason settlers first came to Amador County.

The hamlet of Sutter Creek was merely a wide spot in the road - a stopover between Sutter's Fort and the "piney woods" of what was then the eastern end of Sutter's Mexican land grant.



The picture above is what has become the Hotel Sutter at the base of "Humbug Hill" - ca. 1854

John Sutter began sending timber crews into this area in about 1846 when California was still part of Northern Mexico. They began harvesting and processing trees into usable boards by constructing a "saw pit" somewhere 3 or 4 miles from today's Sutter Creek and between Shake Ridge Road and the creek. After all, it takes a lot of lumber to build an empire! A saw pit is basically a large hole in the ground with a man down below and a man above. The men operate, by hand, a large 2-man saw with each alternately pushing and pulling the saw up and down cutting boards from raw trees.



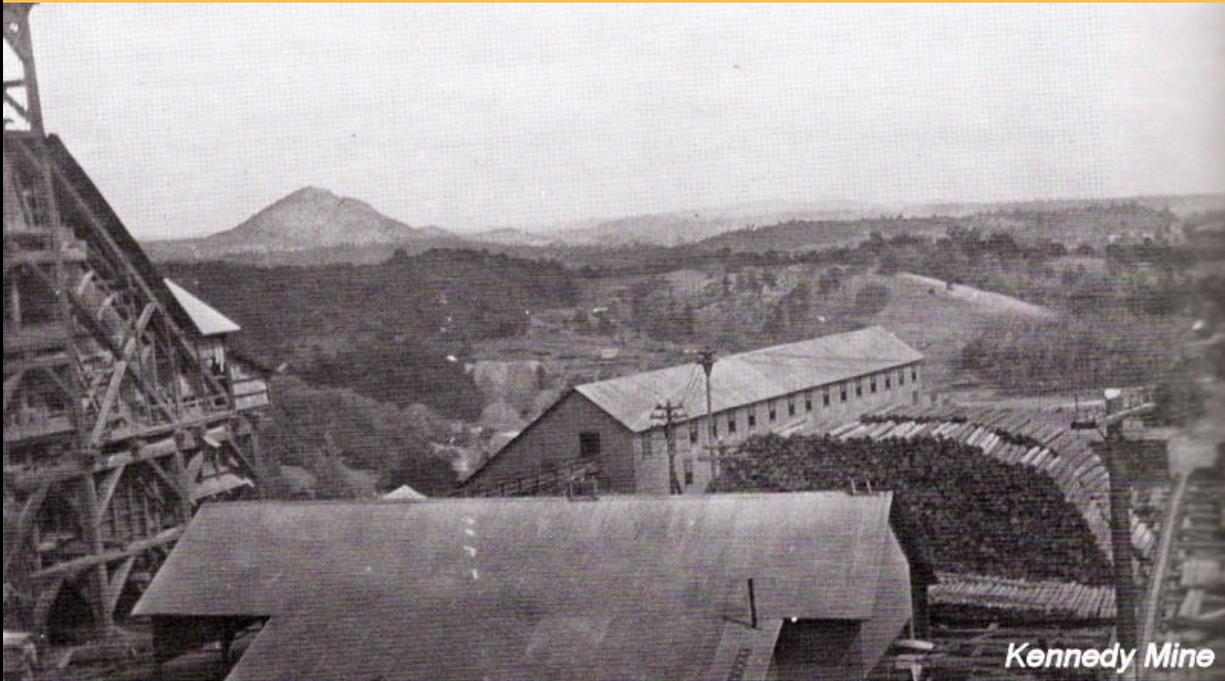


The trees themselves were cut down manually with axes and saws and hauled by horses, mules, and oxen. Hard work for tough men!

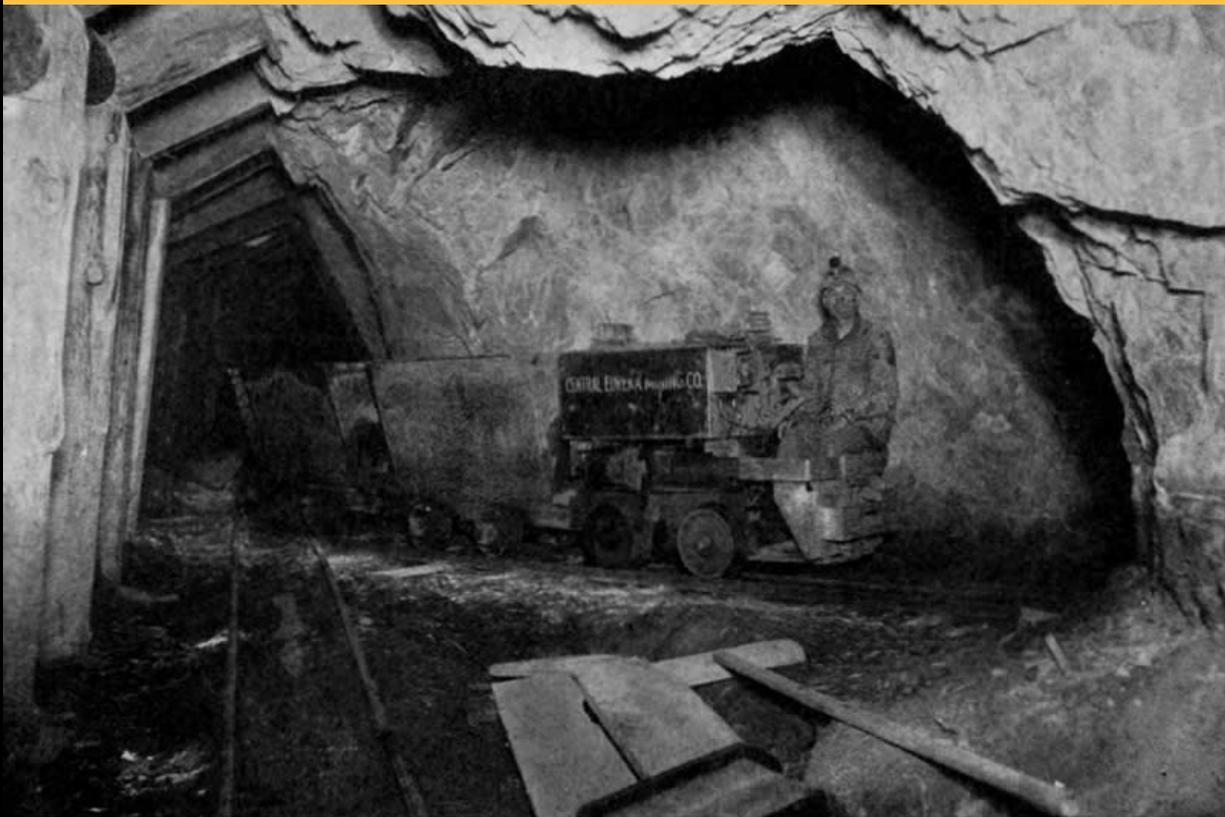


After gold was discovered while building another sawmill in order to increase production, this "empire" idea began to fall apart. Within a year or two of the initial discovery in 1848, most of the loose, relatively accessible placer gold had been picked up or was too small to care about. Mines and miners began to move underground following quartz veins which contained more gold. Lumber became a very hot commodity for not only buildings, but tunnel supports in the mines. Early towns such as San Francisco, Sacramento, and every town around here were made entirely of wood. Brick buildings became a good idea, usually after a town had burned to the ground once or twice. On top of this need for building lumber, the mines of the Mother Lode

became voracious consumers of wood products.

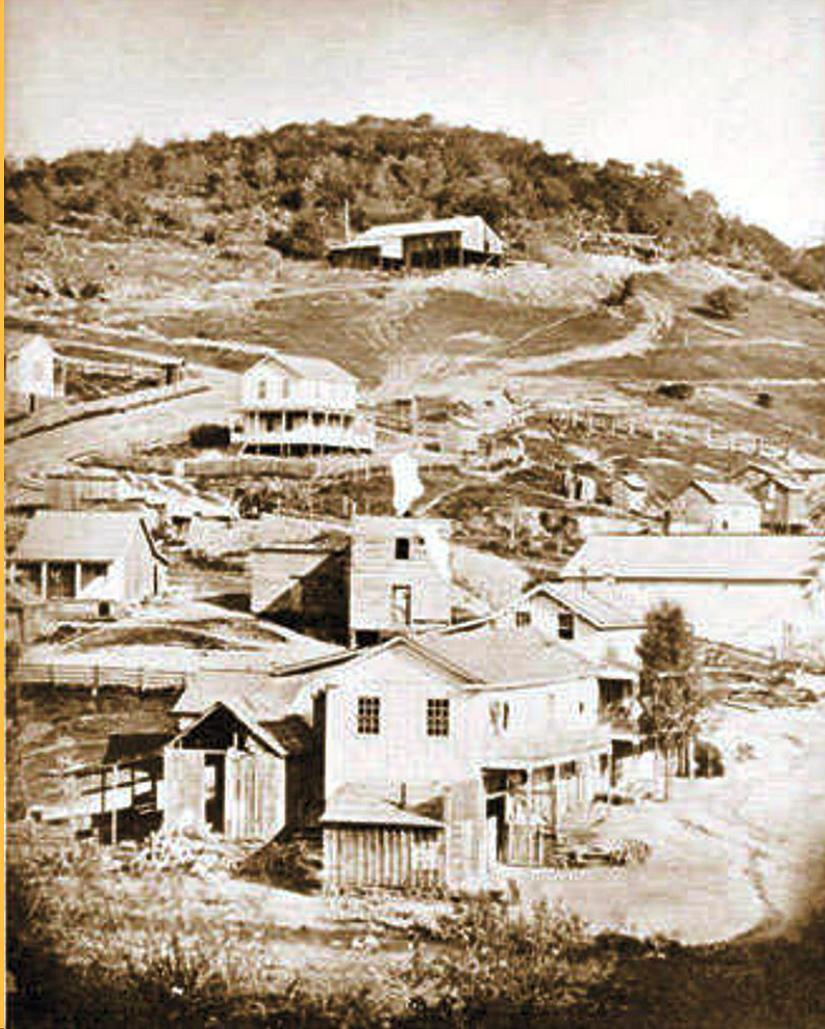


Stop to consider that practically everything was influenced by the availability of wood. Most buildings were at least partially constructed of wood, sidewalks were made of wood, wagons for transportation were made of wood and nearly every home or business had a wood burning fireplace and cooking stove. Mines not only used huge timbers for tunnel supports, but most large equipment was steam powered requiring - you guessed it - firewood.



Mother Lode Gold Belt of CA Pg 100
Old Eureka Mine

Old photographs show our local hills covered with scrub brush, all the choice large trees having been removed.



Now that the mines are silent and lumber isn't the local resource it once was, ol' Mother Nature has a chance to catch up. She has mostly recovered from the ravages of the Gold Rush in her slow and steady way. Today there are many large trees around, both pine and oak. but they are almost never 100 years old or older.



HIGH SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIPS

The SCCBF has established yet another way to respond to a need and continue with our community enrichment. Three scholarships, each for \$1,000, will be awarded to high school students in Amador County.

An announcement of the winners will be highlighted in an issue of our monthly newsletter and on our Facebook page. If you are not currently on our newsletter distribution list, send a request with your email address to info@sccbf.org.

You can designate that your donation be specifically applied to this scholarship fund. Donations to our general fund are used to address needs that make a lasting contribution in our community.

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Do you know someone who would like to receive our monthly newsletter? Send contact information to info@sccbf.org to be added to our distribution list.

Whether it's a love of our heritage, a special connection to our town's diverse, deeply rooted cultures, or a desire to improve your community, every donor's passion for Sutter Creek is unique. A gift to Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation is the perfect way to fund your passion and watch it prosper. By connecting people who care with causes that matter, we help ensure a stronger, healthier tomorrow. We provide a simple, powerful and highly personal approach to giving. (Donations to SCCBF are received through the Amador Community Foundation.)