

# *Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation*

June Newsletter, 2021

## **54 Main Street, Sutter Creek A Story That Only a Few May Know**



The white building with four windows, second from the left

above, is the old Levaggi Opera House and dance hall. This photo was taken in 1939 before the addition of the front balcony.

The Opera House was the home of many galas. The Levaggi brothers would stoke the furnace built in the basement to warm the building. Vaudeville groups were known to try out their acts before going on to larger audiences. In back of the Opera House, an area known as the “chicken roost” had benches available for 25 cents. One could also sit in the reserved section which consisted of chairs and balconies on both sides. The floors were cleaned by pushing bales of hay around. Many organizations in town would use the hall over and over for their doings.

# LEVAGGI OPERA HOUSE

THE FRONT BUILDING BUILT  
IN 1860. THE OPERA HOUSE WAS  
BUILT ON BACK IN 1892 BY  
JOHN AND MICHAEL LEVAGGI,  
EARLY PIONEERS AND STONE  
MASONS FROM ITALY. BRICKS  
USED WERE KILNED EAST OF  
SUTTER CREEK AND HAULED TO  
SITE BY TWELVE MULE TEAM.  
AMAPOLA PARLOR NO. 80  
N.D.G.W. WAS INSTITUTED HERE  
ON APRIL 27, 1894. THE  
BUILDING SERVED AS AN  
OPERA HOUSE FOR 35 YEARS.

DEDICATED  
APRIL 24, 1977  
AMAPOLA PARLOR NO. 80  
NATIVE DAUGHTERS  
OF THE GOLDEN WEST

Although the plaque on the building states the old Levaggi Opera House was built in 1860, it seems as though the site might be the city's most historic.

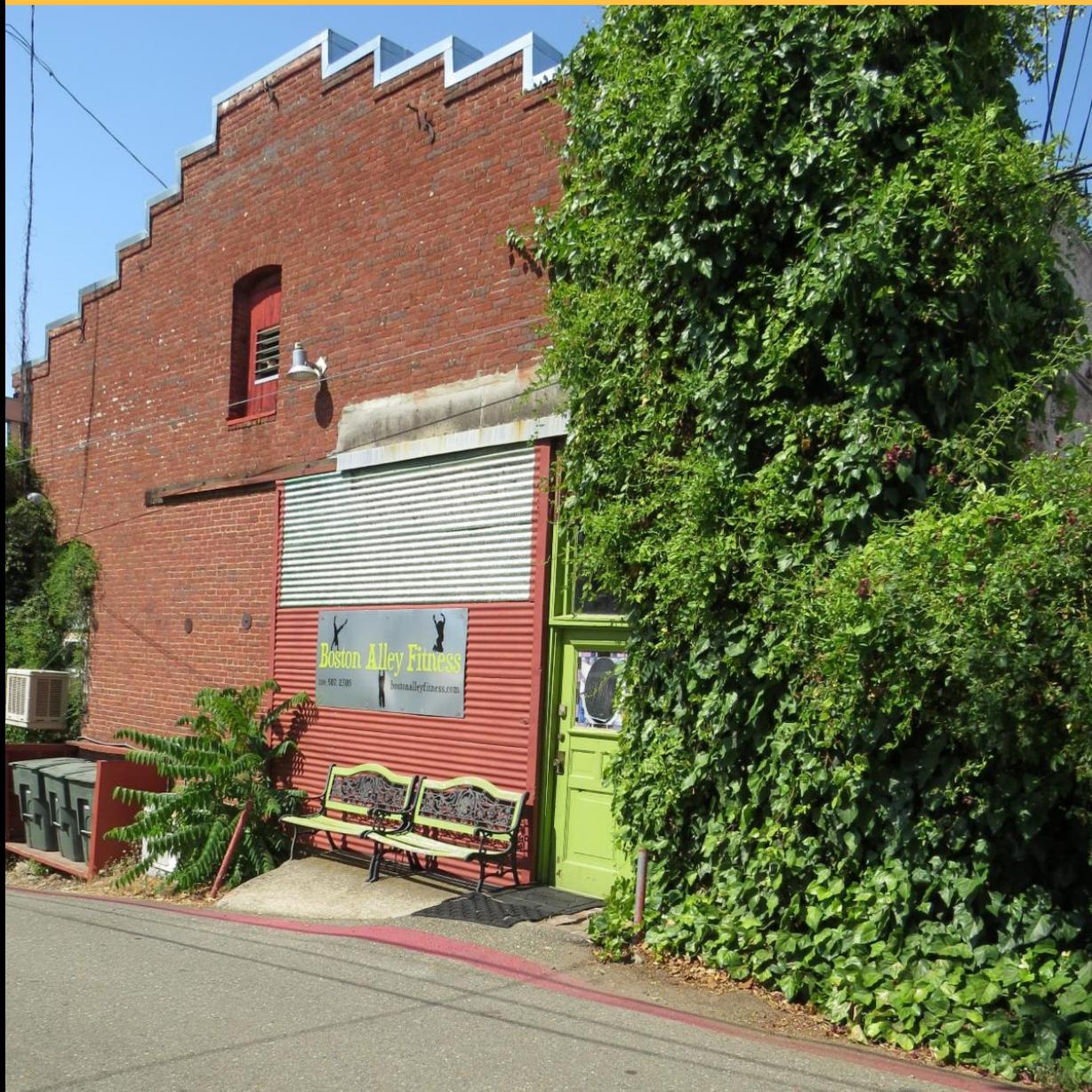


Sitting on Main Street's highest point, historians called the rise Little Humbug Hill. On this site in 1851, merchants Hanford and Downs (later Wildman and Downs) built one of their pioneer trading posts. Other trading posts could be found in Amador City and Volcano. In 1843, Little Humbug Hill and the trading post were considered the center of town. Sutter Creek city limits extended for one mile in all directions from a flagpole in front.

In 1862 and again in 1865, fire destroyed the store and most other wooden buildings. After this second fire, Wildman moved his store across Main Street next to Brignole's new stone building. In 1870, Amador County Laborer's Association (ACLA), one of the first mining unions in the west, erected a one-story brick union hall on the lot known today as 54 Main Street.

In 1872, another fire swept through the east side of Main Street damaging the union hall. Had the building survived, as the plaque says, it would be the West's oldest hall. In 1888, fire erupted again damaging the union hall, and before long the side and front walls fell. Owner Leopold Rabolt purchased the lot to the south and rebuilt the building yet again. This new building's main use became social and commercial rather than

union.



In 1892, new owners John (Giovanni) and Mike Levaggi extended the building by 32 feet to Boston Alley. The downstairs was used as a theater and dance floor. The upstairs was used as a meeting place for social or fraternal organizations. It was considered the town's cultural center from 1888 to approximately 1957.

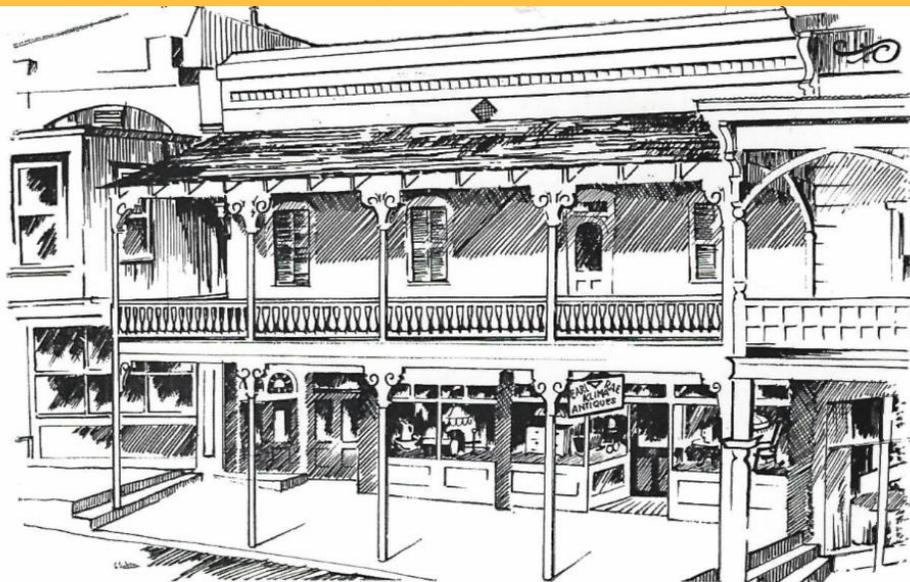
The small stage door can still be seen from Boston Alley. Some of the original wall detail remains in the attic ceiling, as well as the ornate molding around the walls. To quote a paragraph from the Levaggi Opera House Dedication in 1977, "The brick is still red, the character is still there, and the ghosts of many memories and happy events pervade the atmosphere. A piece of our heritage has been preserved."

As the high school had no gymnasium when it was built, the

Opera House's back lot was used as a basketball court. Over the years, the building has been a plumbing shop, a Mexican restaurant, a variety store, a pool hall, judge's chambers, a drug store, and a hat and shoe shop.



The Levaggi brothers, stone masons by trade, were instrumental in the construction of the large brick addition at Sutter Creek's Historic Grammar School.



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True to its previous history, a fire in 1927 demolished the Opera House. References from 1977 show that the building was once again restored and was owned at that time by Earl and Rae Klima, who operated an antique store on the premises.



Currently, as the building stands today, it is home to 3 Chicks gift shop and Gateway Sotheby's International Real Estate on the ground floor facing Main Street and Boston Alley Fitness facing Boston Alley. The upstairs, facing Main Street, is home to apartments.

## Save the Date

The Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation will be hosting a Member and Donor Appreciation event on August 19 from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm at the Historic Sutter Creek Grammar School. All members and donors (of course, new members are always welcome!) are invited to enjoy appetizers, cookies, coffee and wine, all while listening to live music and/or strolling through the grammar school to see how your generous donations have contributed to the restoration of the school.

*Yes, we have been busy doing more restoration during this last year.*

So **SAVE THE DATE**, join us on August 19, and have some fun!

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