

Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation

July Newsletter, 2021

Sutter Creek in Ashes! **Headline from the March 3, 1888 Amador Dispatch**



As with many Gold Rush settlements, fire was a constant threat to early Sutter Creek. The rich forests along the Mother Lode provided the timber resources needed to quickly build (and rebuild) a town in the mid-1800s. Unfortunately, wooden buildings, built shoulder to shoulder, were a perfect setting for disastrous fires. Sutter Creek suffered dozens of fires in its first 50 years. The business district fell victim to the worst fires. The most disastrous fires occurred in 1862, 1865, 1868, and 1888.

The 1868 fire led to two major improvements intended to protect against further disasters. The most visible of which was the replacement of wood framed structures with stone and brick walled structures fitted with iron shutters. Although the stone and brick were fire resistant, they did not prevent the fires from entering the interior of the buildings through vents, loading chutes, and other unguarded openings. As shown in photos following the 1888 fire, this frequently resulted in the buildings being gutted from the inside, leaving only stone and brick shells.



Accounts of the fire were printed in the Amador Dispatch, Amador Record, and described in a letter from a local citizen in the Amador Ledger.

"The Heart of the Town Swept by Flames - Three Business Blocks Obliterated"

"The most disastrous that Amador County has witnessed within the knowledge of this writer, swept over Sutter Creek on Thursday afternoon, utterly destroying three-fourths of the business portion of town. It broke out at a time when everything was favorable for the fire-fiend to assert his terrible supremacy. It was one of the windiest days experienced this season. A perfect hurricane was blowing from the southeast, and before such a wind the flames laughed as it were at the puny efforts of man to stay their onward march." (Read the full article at the

Telegrams were sent to Jackson and Amador City requesting that whatever fire hose they had should be sent over, and in response a crowd from Jackson at once started, and the hose from the county seat was in Sutter, in 20 minutes from the time of starting, and did good work in preventing the spread of the fire among the dwelling houses in the rear of Beebe's store. The hose from Amador was quickly on the ground, with a strong force from that town.

Letter to Mrs. (Georgia) Charles Bailey from sister, Gertrude Downs

Dear Georgia

By this time no doubt you have heard of the dreadful fire Sutter has suffered from. The wind blew terrible that day and carried fire everywhere. Early during the fire, Indelkofer's shed caught. Mrs. Booker saw it and it was soon put out. The whole neighborhood had hoses out ready for action and many had to use them. I was alone here with Mary, when someone said that Stewart's barn was blazing and sure enough it was. So we had to get our hoses in one place for we had them all about, not knowing but (?) where we might have to use them any where. We had two boys to call on that fortunately were in the street and we some got ready and ladders up. But the wind blew so hard it seemed as though the water would never strike the right place. But very soon Robert and another man came and soon it was put out. It burned quite a hole in the barn roof and two smaller ones. Jansen house caught, John Brown's, Jim Hayes, Joe Fountainrosa's and I do not know how many more on our street. The men worked hard to save Mrs. Voorhies but succeeded. We all got a terrible scare and I am so lame I can hardly get up or down. Robert is no better, besides a terrible cold on his lungs. He came down from being soaking wet and clothes in rags. You may know that he was in the thickest of the fire for he always is. -----Letter goes on with other news.

Signed, Gert

The second and most lasting improvement was the establishment of the Sutter Creek Fire Department. The Fire Department was established on August 30, 1869. The documents below testify to the strong community support for the new department. Many of the City's most prominent citizens were active volunteers.



George Allen, one of the original members of the Sutter Creek Fire Company, organized August 30, 1869.

Fire Department Sutter Creek H.L. & B. Co., 1875

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1 – Allen, George | 23 – Long, John |
| 2 – Brinn, M. | 24 – Myers, D. |
| 3 – Byrnes, James | 25 – Marks, L.I. |
| 4 – Burnes, A.J. | 26 – Morgan, E. |
| 5 – Brown , John | 27 – Muller, Pat. |
| 6 – Campbell, A. | 28 – Mannon, S.S. |
| 7 – Callaway, A.E. | 29 – Mahoney, Jerry |
| 8 – Danielewicz , G. | 30 – McHenry, R. |
| 9 – Donnelly, D. | 31 – McAlluce, S.R. |
| 10– Downs, R.C. | 32 – Newman, Jacob |
| 11 – Donovan, E. | 33 – Nickerson, C. J. |
| 12 – Downs, W.W. | 34 – Pettengill, S. E. |
| 13 – Ellis, V. E. | 35 – Paterson, D.A. |
| 14 – Fontenrose, L.J. | 36 – Payne, Frank |
| 15 – Frakes, Thos. | 37 – Parker, George |
| 16 – Fangan, Peter | 38 – Pratt, J. S. |
| 17 – Howard, F.A. | 39 – Scott, Samuel |
| 18 – Hall, D.K. | 40 – Smith,C. |
| 19 – Jansens, J. | 41 – Stowers, W. A. |
| 20 – Keyes, John | 42 – Thielo, Wlm. |
| 21 – Kelly, John B. | 43 – Turner, William |
| 22 – Kelly, H.R. | 44 – Vidal, A. |

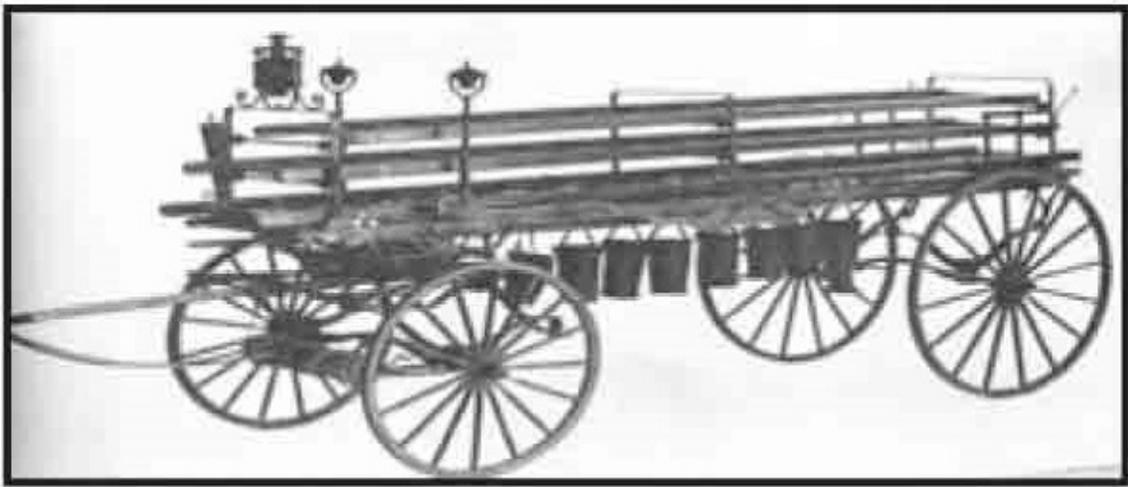
I hereby certify that the above is a full, true and complete list of members in good standing, now belonging to the Sutter Creek Fire Department.

District of Sutter Creek. January, 19th 1875

Attest: D. Meyers, Secry – Secretary – Sutter Creek H. L. & B. Co.

Filed January 21, 1875 – J.B. Stevens, Clerk

Initially, the Fire Department relied on bucket brigades and manually operated pumps and hoses mounted on horse drawn wagons and carts. The original hose cart and fire wagon have been restored and are on exhibit at the Sutter Creek Fire Department Station and the historic fire house located next to City Hall.



Undaunted by the economic challenges of the times, the Sutter Creek Fire Department built their own fire engines in 1927 and 1935.

Sutter Creek Will Build Part Of New Fire Truck

The committee of six firemen of the Sutter Creek department held its first meeting on Monday evening in the Firemen's Hall. The members decided to purchase a 1½-ton Dodge Chassis and build the balance of the truck, including the tank, in Sutter Creek. The contention is that the town can boast of enough talent and necessary equipment to do the work. This committee is lucky in having four of its members inclined toward mechanics. This is the first step toward giving Sutter Creek improved fire protection.



Sutter Creek has suffered greatly from fires throughout its history. The fact that the City exists at all is largely due to the strong community spirit of the citizenry and especially the dedication and community spirit of the Sutter Creek Fire

Department.

A special thank you is due Ed Arata and Fire Chief Dominic Moreno for their efforts to preserve and share the history of Sutter Creek and the Sutter Creek Fire Department.

Save the Dates

August 19 - The Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation will be hosting a Member and Donor Appreciation event 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.

September 19 - We are also proud to announce that a patron donor has graciously funded the re-installation of a new national flag and pole at the Historic Sutter Creek Grammar School. A public ceremony to raise the flag will be held at 5:00 pm. The original flag raising ceremony was held on April 10, 1890. Join us while we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the school with an open house from 3:00 – 6:00 pm highlighting the restoration progress.

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

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DONATE TODAY

Do you know someone who would like to receive our monthly newsletter? Send contact information to info@sccbfb.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.)