

Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation

January Newsletter, 2022

A Short Chronicle of the Sutter Creek-Volcano Turnpike

Today it's the road people love to hate. With the potholes, many curves, steep drop-offs, and lack of shoulders combined with bicycle riders, runners, and other wildlife, the Sutter Creek-Volcano Road is at best an adventure, and at worst downright dangerous. A look back into the 19th century, however, reveals that things were not always so.

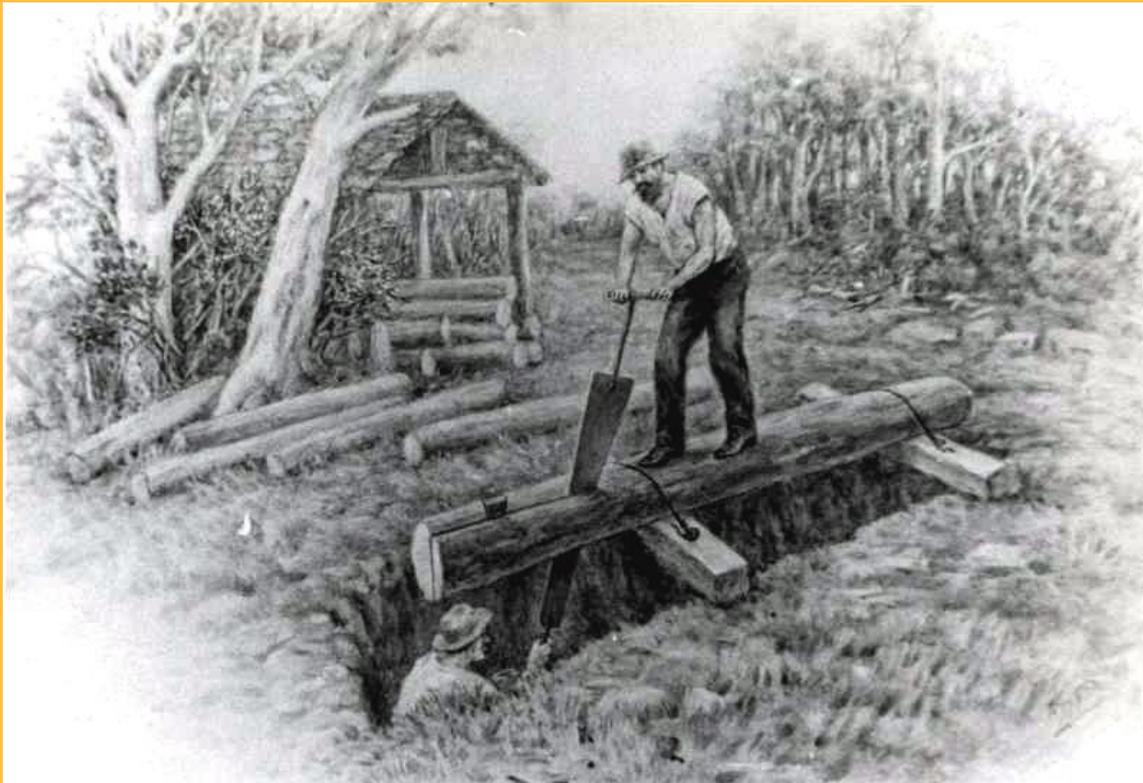
This short, 12-mile sometimes too narrow road, is absolutely a beautiful country thoroughfare that has developed from a network of deer and native trails meandering along the creek. It connected villages of Miwok scattered along Sutter Creek with the larger Chaw'se site near Volcano.





Miwok Roundhouse About 1900

As Europeans began to exploit timber resources in the area, a rudimentary saw pit was established somewhere near Oneto Road in the mid-1840's to support John Sutter's building plans.



A Typical Gold Rush Era Saw Pit

However, saw pits are very slow and extremely laborious

enterprises. As the Gold Rush took hold and miners moved in, the demand for rough sawn lumber jumped off the chart. By the early 1850's, at least one water powered sawmill was in operation on the creek. At that time, what is now Eureka Street was "the road". It led out of Sutter Creek and stayed on that side of the creek without crossing. Church Street as road did not exist, it was more of a driveway for the Methodist Church, which was built in 1862, and the blacksmith, which was across from the church, now the corner of Main and Church Streets occupied by the brick building formerly Crain's market.



Typical Water Powered Sawmill

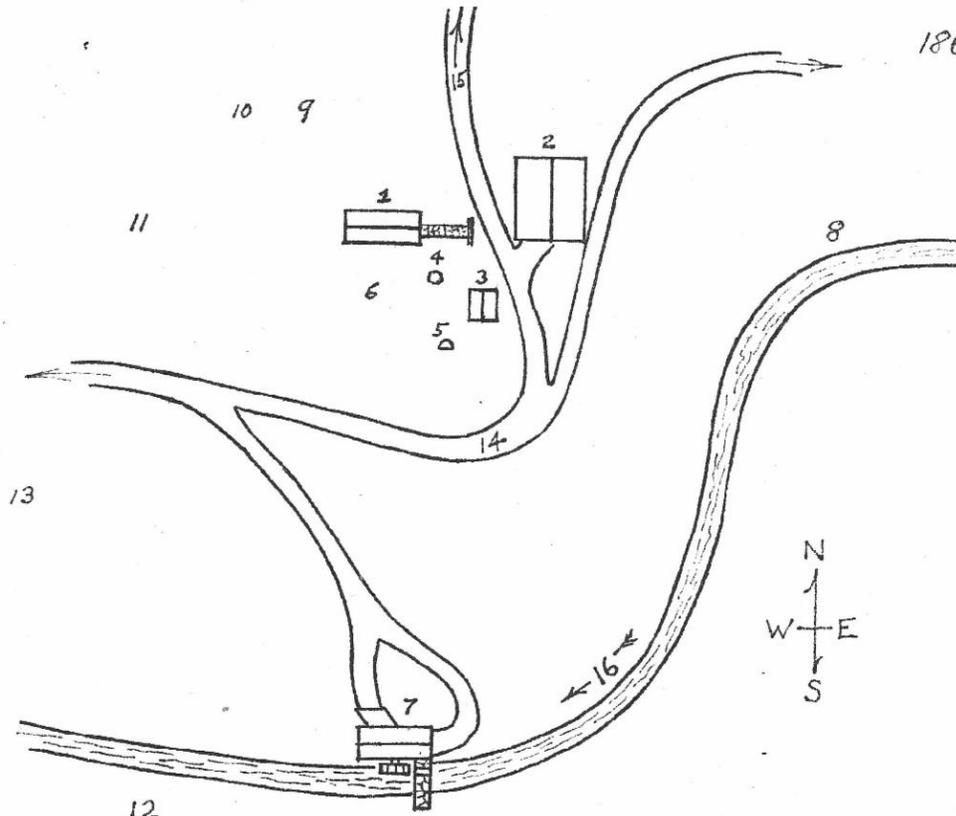
By the mid-1850's to early 1860's, there were three water powered sawmills in operation at approximately 3, 4, and 5 miles from Sutter Creek. The "Upper Mill" was located at what is now the Lion's Club Park. At roughly mile 4 is Blackwell Road which used

to connect Daniel Blackwell's property and sawmill to Shake Ridge Road leading to the metropolis of Volcano.



Foundation and site of Blackwell's Calaveras Lumbering Company Mill.

The Sutter Creek Road ended here. Blackwell's sawmill was across the road on the creek while the family home and out buildings were on the north side.



The Blackwell Ranch In Its Prime....circa 1860

- 1) 15' x 40' two story house with 3' x 25' white cobblestone walkway leading up to it with attractive arbor entrance at the east end
- 2) 40' x 50' barn
- 3) small blacksmith shop
- 4) stonework well, approximately 45' deep
- 5) stonework oven (only item on map still in existence)
- 6) manmade rock ledge
- 7) Calaveras Lumber Co. (flooded out in rain season of 1861) rock dam, waterwheel, loading ramp to north, lumber collection dock to east...structure situated 238' south of Blackwell house
- 8) old mines in creekbed
- 9) old fig tree
- 10) stonework Indian implements unearthed in later years
- 11) vineyard
- 12) orchard, primarily apple...approximately 100 trees
- 13) two gravenstein apple trees
- 14) Sutter Creek / Volcano Turnpike Road west to the town of Sutter Creek, east to Volcano
- 15) road to Leeth Ranch, then northeast, then east to Volcano...merging with the Drytown / Volcano Road
- 16) Sutter's Creek flowing east to west

The area around the house and well, etc. was fenced in...as was the vineyard

Map showing Blackwell Property, Road, and Mill



Blackwell's Oven #5 on Map

His milling operation was the Calaveras Lumbering Company established sometime in the mid-1850's and included 2 partners. At roughly mile 3 was the "lower mill" and the "lumber road" leading to it. Many lumbering related artifacts have been unearthed in this area.



In 1863, 12 partners incorporated and surveyed the "Sutter Creek-Volcano Turnpike". At that time the existing road beginning with Eureka Street was graded and approved staying on the north side of the creek to Blackwell's.

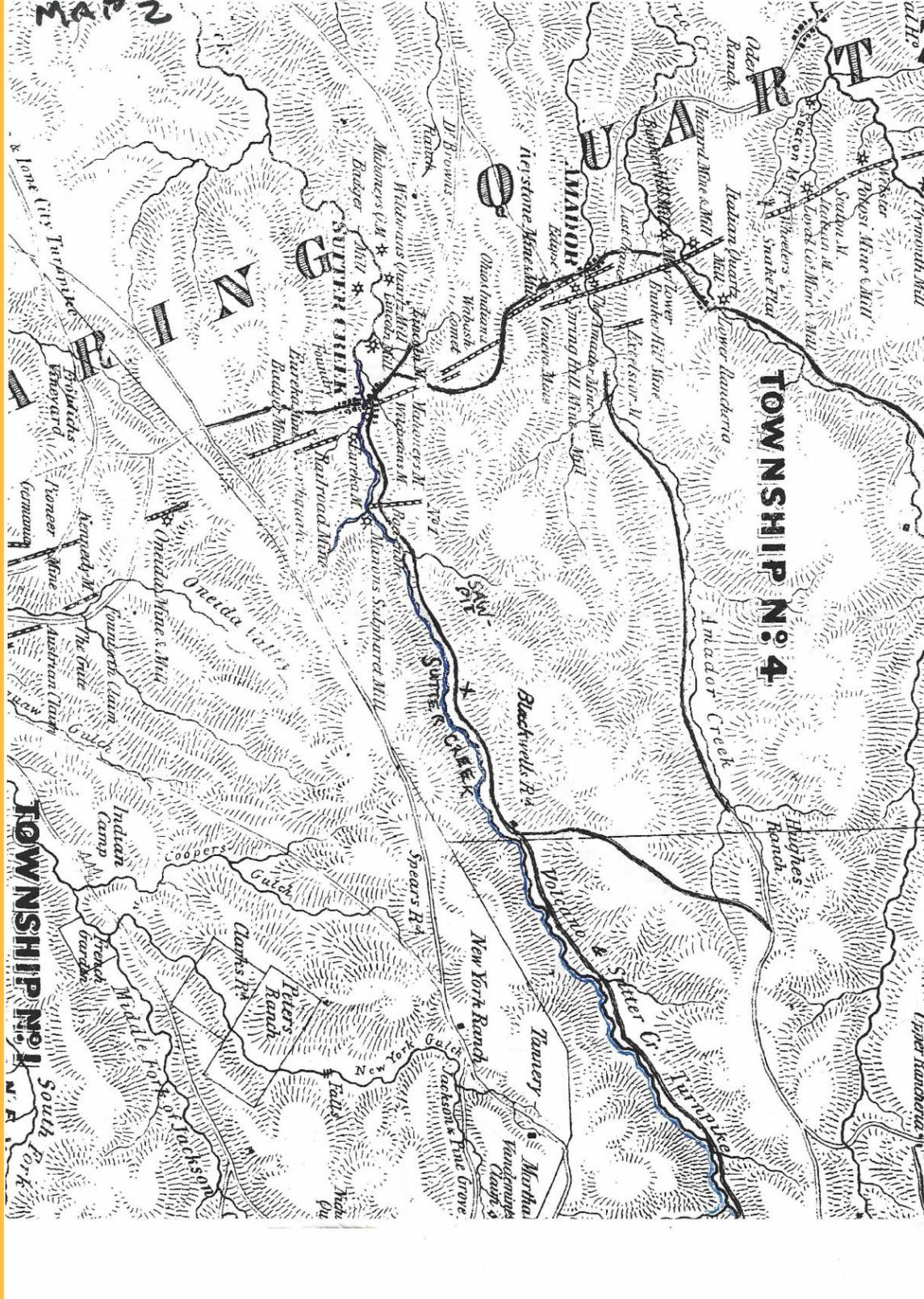


Horse Powered Road Grader

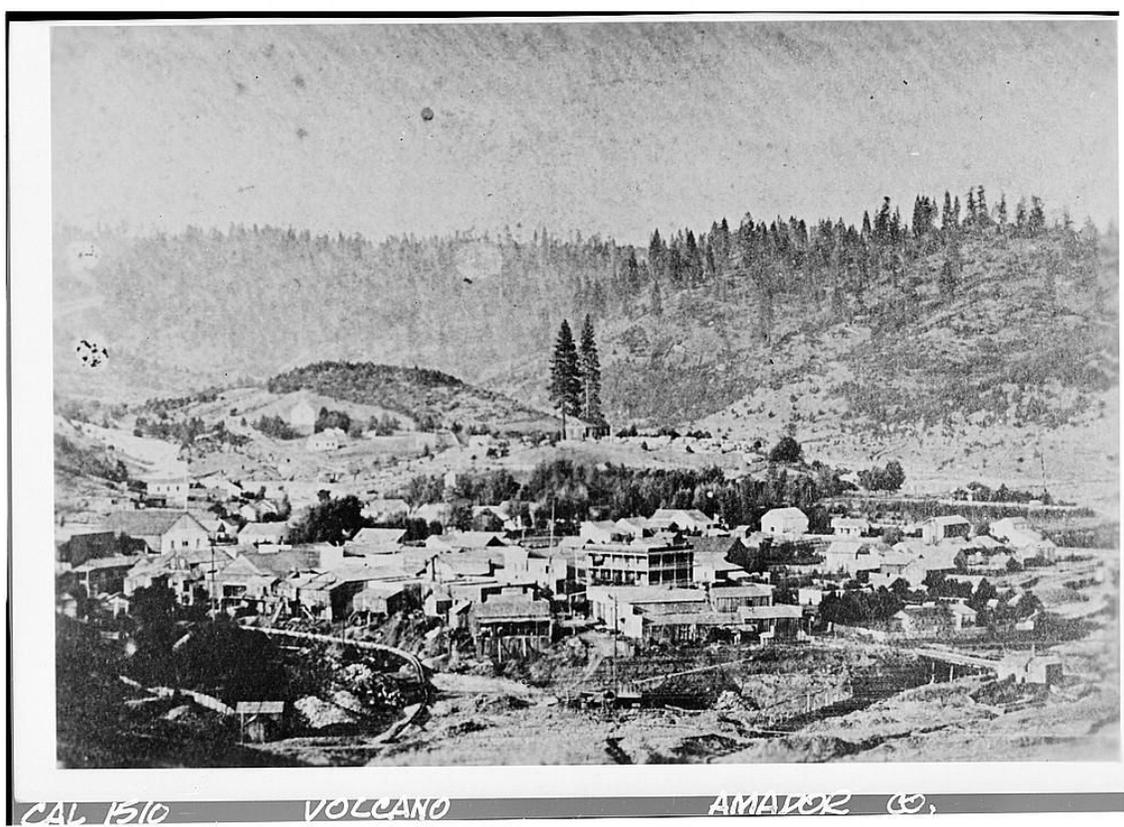
The road was then pushed through, still on the north side, all the way to Volcano. The purpose was to provide easier access from Sutter Creek to the sawmills and on to Volcano without using Shake Ridge Road and the very steep Blackwell Road or equally steep Charleston or Ram's Horn Grade. You have to remember that freight wagons don't have much horse power or particularly good brakes.



Lumbering team going to a mill - oxen powered.



Map showing Original Sutter Creek-Volcano Turnpike



Boom town Volcano in its Heyday

Volcano was booming in those days, but things soon cooled and began to decline. Volcano no longer fueled the demand for construction lumber upcountry. By the late 1860's all three sawmills using Sutter Creek for power had been swept away and into history by the creek's periodic flooding. None were ever rebuilt. The road survived, but the reason for it's creation in the first place was gone.



Ruins of Water Powered Sawmill

Today the route has changed slightly. Eureka Street no longer carries on to Volcano, but ends about 1/2 mile from town. Church Street now takes you out of town on the south side of the creek through the former Allen lumber yard and the Swift family's gigantic red barn on your right side. About a mile and a half later a bridge takes the road across Sutter Creek back to the north side and reconnects with the original course toward the small village of Volcano.

The sawmills are long gone, but occasionally a rusty axe head or two-man saw blade help recall the hectic beginnings of our beloved Amador County.



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The Historic Sutter Creek Grammar School is rich in Gold Rush history. This beautiful building is California's second oldest two-story brick schoolhouse. The Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation has restored the first and second floor making it a wonderful rental for any occasion. There are four rooms within the Historic Grammar School that can be rented.

Contact the City of Sutter Creek for information on rates and availability - (209) 267-5647 ext. 230 or email info@cityofsuttercreek.org

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

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