

# *Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation*

*July Newsletter, 2022*

This month, we at the SCCBF, are deeply involved in a new project at our beloved historic grammar school. We will bring you up to date in the near future on this long-needed project. Because of the time involved, we have not been able to author a fresh newsletter for the month of July. We hope you will enjoy this "Blast from the Past" and we look forward to showing you the improvements accomplished by our friend and contractor, Alex Armstrong, in addition to other renovation accomplishments over the last few years.

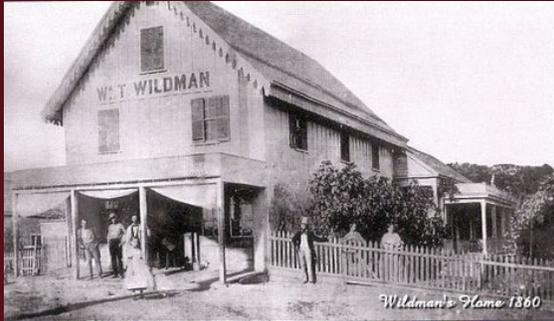
Plan to stop by on August 13 when we will again open the grammar school to the public from 10:00 am - 3:00 pm as part of Sutter Creek's Second Saturday tour of historic places.

## **A Brief History of the Wildman Family and Mine in Sutter Creek**



William T. Wildman was born in 1825 in Danbury, Connecticut. He married Julia Campbell in 1848 and by 1851 he was a resident of the early camp of Sutter

Creek, also called Sutter's Town and Suttersville. He filed a mining claim in 1851 and opened a miner's supply store on Spanish Street around that time.



After a fire in 1854 destroyed his Miner's Supplies store (with the rest of the business district), he acquired an interest in the former Hanford-Downs store at the top of Humbug Hill. Today the site of his store is the location of the Native Sons of the Golden West, Parlor #17, on Main Street. That store, along with the upstairs residence, burned in 1861. Enough was enough! In 1862 he built the family residence (still occupied by descendants) on south Main Street on the other side of today's bridge that crosses the creek. The safety of the creek separated the "uptown" residents from the multitude of saloons, gambling houses, and of course, the red light district.

**In the late 1850's, Mr. Wildman was able to buy into the former Mahoney Mine located in the area above the post office. The ruins of the Wildman Mine are still visible on the hilltop above the historic grammar school on Cole Street. In 1870 the Wildmans donated land below the mine site to build Sutter Creek a new grammar school after the original was destroyed by fire in that year.**



On Gopher Flat Road, at the site of the current post office, is the Powder House where explosives were kept. This is also the site of the Wildman 12 stamp mill, and later a 70 stamp mill. The Emerson Shaft, which was used as an air chute and hoist to dispose of waste rock that was later used to pave roads, is located on the hill above the old grammar school. It reached a depth of 1500 feet. The combined mines produced a total of \$5 million in

**The Wildman Mining Co. operated successfully through the 1880's and in 1894 bought out the Mahoney Mine. In 1906 the Wildman-Mahoney Mining Company was acquired by the Lincoln Mining Company owned by Leland Stanford. William T. Wildman, long-time Sutter Creek resident, entrepreneur, and pioneer died in 1899 and is buried in the Sutter Creek cemetery.**



## **An Except from a letter written in 1854 by William Wildman to his brother-in-law John Campbell**

Brother John:

I have just received a letter from Julia and enclosed was one that you had written to her which she wished me to answer to you. It seems that the California fever has not entirely run out in the States yet and besides that you have got it as well as you say you are bound to come. I will not try to discourage you, but answer the questions to the best of my knowledge.

First, as to what masons get per day, I do not know now, but one year ago they would command seven dollars per day in the City (San Francisco) and scarce that, but it is of course left now though there is a great deal of building in the different cities at present, and I think if you understand that you would do better at it than anything else. In fact masonries of any kind can do the best here, farmers wages will be small the present season. Last year many were hired for forty dollars for a month, and as to mining in general it pays but small wages. In fact the great majority don't do more than make a living. While some few do well, as to working hard, they work just about the same as when they hire out in the States.

The fall is much the best time to come to this country. I would sooner wait six months than come at any other season and as to baggage, I would bring nothing but a light hand satchel with a change of shirts as clothing is as cheap here as in the States. Well now I think I have answered your questions as as to coming to California, I would not recommend it and more especially to a man that has a family to leave behind. If I was to try it again should take my family along. You must know it's rather unpleasant to be this separated but if you try it you will know more about and perhaps a little better than I could explain it so will not make the attempt.

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### **DESCENDANTS**

In 1886, William and Julia's daughter Helena married William McGee of Plymouth, California and lived in the Wildman house on Main Street, Sutter

Creek. Their three children (Ralph, Margaret, and Helen McGee) all attended the historic Sutter Creek Grammar School as did Ralph's four children (John, Betty, Mary, and Bill). Ralph McGee, with his wife Margaret Marchant McGee of Lone, moved into the Wildman house in 1922 and descendants of the Wildman-McGee families continue to live in the Main Street house today. In 1946, Ralph McGee was appointed Superior Court Judge for Amador County by Governor Earl Warren. His popularity caused him to be repeatedly reelected by the people of Amador County, and he served the next 30 years in this important position. Ralph and Margaret both were very active in the Sutter Creek Methodist Church founded by William Wildman. Both of Ralph and Margaret's daughters (Mary and Betty McGee) were married in the Methodist Church. Over the years numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren have been baptized there. Today the family home is owned and occupied by Betty McGee's oldest son and his wife.



**Betty McGee's Grammar School Class**  
(Betty is in the front row, fourth from left)

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