

Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation

(nonprofit 501(c)3 – Tax ID #87-1825043)

December Newsletter, 2023

Do You Remember...?

The Amador Central Railroad

Remember the traffic backing up when trains slowed and stopped at the crossing just above Meeks? Remember the crossing guard arms occasionally getting stuck down with no train in sight? Remember cautiously going around them while remembering what happened to Wile E. Coyote in old Road Runner cartoons? Well, the old Amador Central Railroad that was once a vital part of the transportation system over 120 years ago, moving passengers and freight in and out of the county, is still with us. Today the railroad is a federally recognized tourist railroad with 10 miles of track intact and active.

The year 1876 saw the completion of a rail line from Galt to Lone. Transport to and from Lone was done by stagecoach and freight wagon.



Stage and six-horse team at Sunnybrook-Ranlett where tracks cross Highway 88.

The importance of access to the gold mines and timber was extremely important and planning began to extend the line further into the hills. It took another 25 years for it to happen.

In 1904, a fellow by the name of Jackson Dennis began selling bonds to fund the Lone and Eastern Railway Company. By August, Dennis was buying a 100 foot right-of-way from each landowner for \$10 in gold coin.



\$10 gold piece circa 1907

By February of 1905, the line was completed as far as Ranlett Station, which was just above the old Newton Copper Mine along Highway 88.



Newton Copper Mine

Newton Copper Mine circa 1905

The month of March saw freight and passengers being delivered to Martell Station.



John Barnhill Collection
Martell, CA. 6-30-64



Martell Station Depot, 1964

Trains ran twice a day and transported freight such as gold, timber, mining equipment, and hydroelectric equipment, in addition to people. The trains also carried large shipments of clay and clay products to market. In 1907, the Lone Firebrick Company received a large order for brick to be shipped to Portland, Oregon. If it were not for the large clay product shipments from Lone, the railroad would probably have failed much earlier than it did.



Lone and Eastern engine circa 1905

Unfortunately, the line did not yield the bonanza hoped for, and the company defaulted on the bonds in 1908. The majority holder of the bonds, Charles Erickson, then purchased the railway, reorganized, and incorporated it as the Amador Central Railroad Company.

Erickson never lived to see the railroad become the success he envisioned, passing away in 1910. His wife, Meta, assumed control, but the company continued to operate in the red. In about 1913, she heeded the advice of the California Railroad Commission and purchased another engine. This finally led to a period of prosperity.

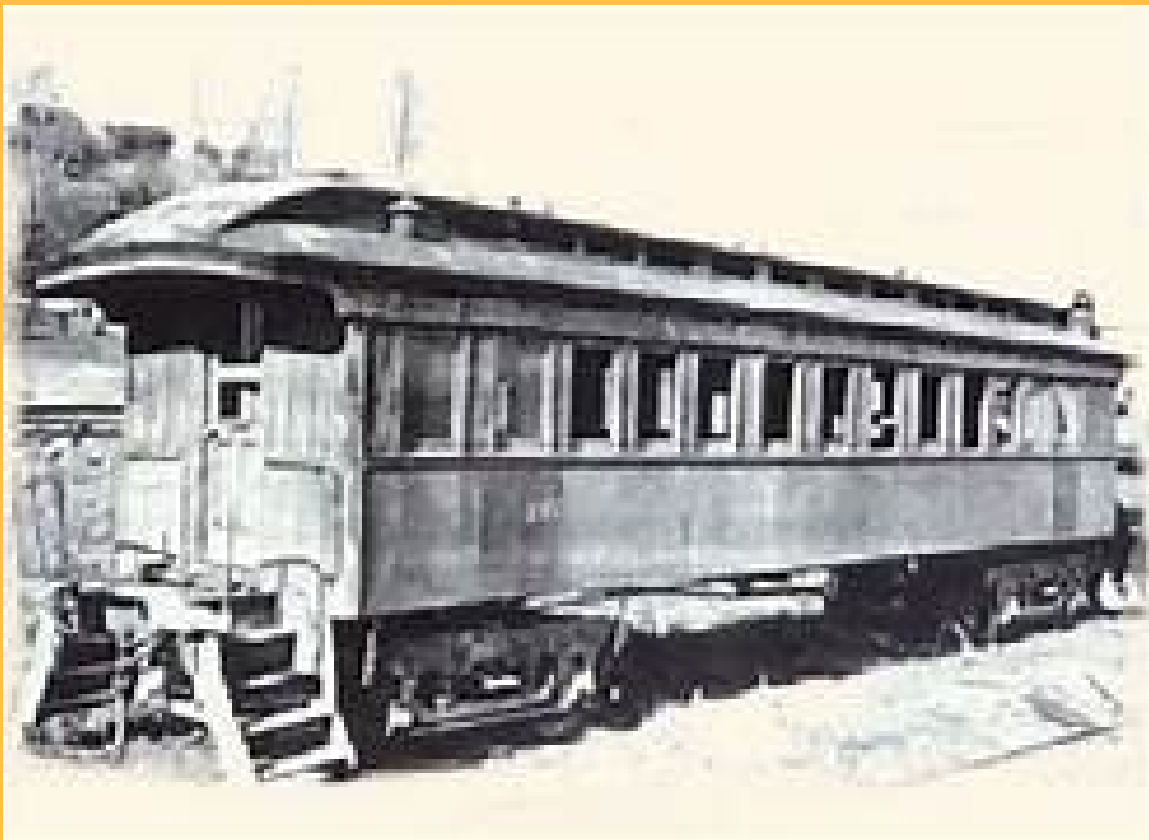


Engine #7 and Coal Car



Engine #7 when purchased new.

But...nothing lasts forever, and the Great Depression spelled trouble. By 1932, riders dwindled to the point that passenger service was discontinued.



Abandoned passenger car.

In 1933, the new President, Franklin Roosevelt, abandoned the gold standard in the United States. Soon two of the largest customers, the Kennedy and Argonaut Mines, temporarily closed, severely impacting profitability.

After fire destroyed three trestles of the original twelve, the owner, Meta Erickson, applied to abandon the line. Sometimes coal or wood burning engines were responsible for starting fires themselves.



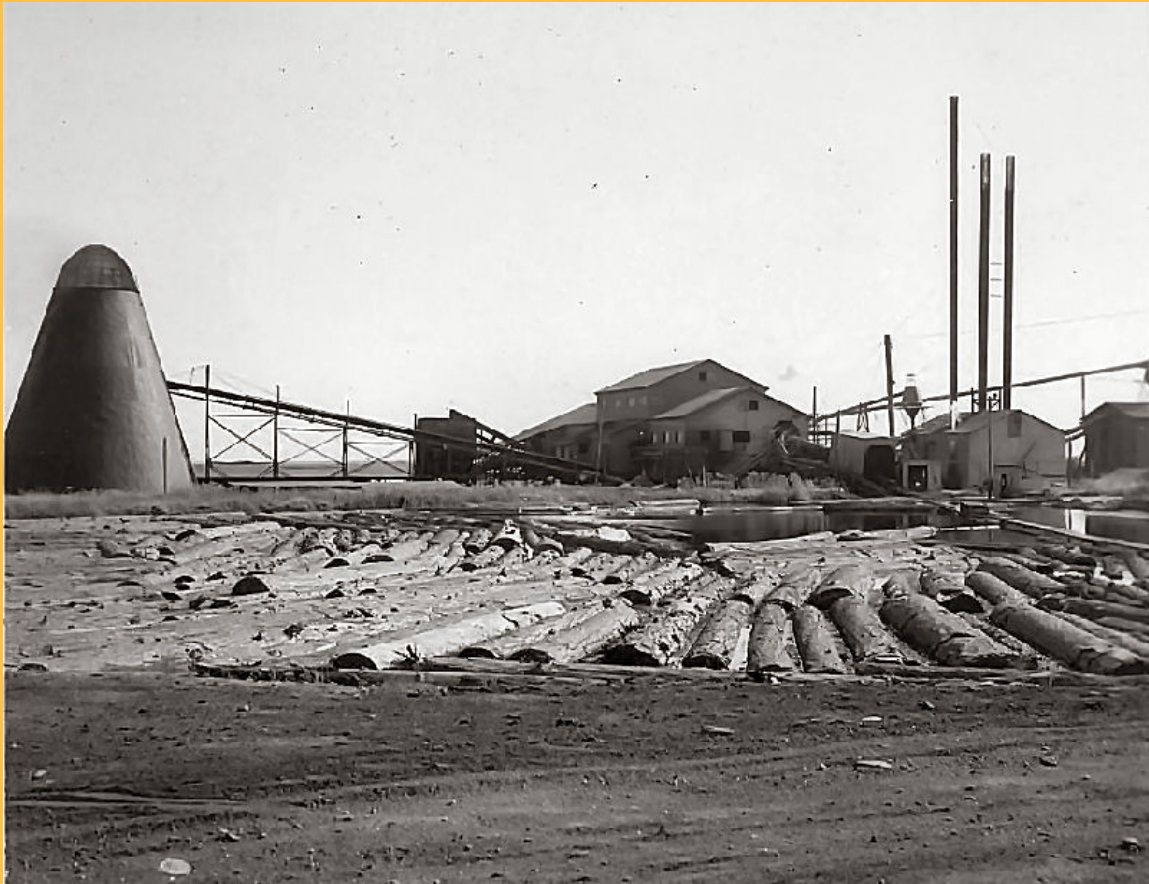
Wooden Trestle

Local businesses rallied, reorganized the line and the abandonment was suspended. Several rickety trestles were rebuilt.



Amador Central Passenger train crossing wooden trestle.

The roadbed was also repaired, replacing most ties as well. A new car workshop and engine shed were constructed at Martell.



Lumber Mill at Martell

In 1940, the Amador Lumber Company built a new mill facility at Martell which would produce more timber and lumber products to be shipped. In addition, the mines reopened and about 20 carloads of ore were shipped daily.

However, along came World War II, and in 1942, gold mines across the country were closed by the government. Gold was considered to be “non-essential” probably for the first time in the history of mankind.

In 1942, the Winton Lumber Company purchased the line. After purchasing newer diesel engines and making needed improvements to the line, they began shipping lumber, brick, and clay westward and mining machinery to other points.



Diesel Engine of Amador Central

In 1964, the Winton Lumber Company and the railroad were purchased by American Forest Products. The Amador Central Railroad was declared to be the shortest standard gauge common carrier operating in the United States.

In 1988, American Forest Products was bought out by George Pacific. In 1996, Georgia Pacific shut down the Martell Mill. In 1998, Sierra Pine purchased the particle board plant. They leased and operated the line, renaming it the Amador Foothills Railroad.



Newer diesel engine of Amador Foothills Railroad.

In 2004, this lease lapsed and Sierra Pine filed to discontinue railroad service. In 2009, the Surface Transportation Board approved abandonment, and Sierra Pine Industries removed the upper three miles of track to accommodate their business park project at Martell. Sierra Pine jumped the gun in doing this because the abandonment had not been approved. The Surface Transportation Board found out about this through the Amador County Historical Society and stopped any further track removal. This action saved the remaining nine miles of track to be used and enjoyed by the public today.



Martell Station and depot just before destruction by developer.

Today, the Amador Central Railroad Corporation owns the railroad and gives small rail car tours while explaining the importance of this historic and once critical local transportation line.



Historic rail line tour underway.

If you're looking for something different, try one of their tours. It's truly fascinating. Email: info@amcrr.org

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

[Visit our Website](#)

[Like us on Facebook](#)

[Contact Us](#)

SCCBF's current renovation project is the Historic Sutter Creek Grammar School which is rich in Gold Rush history. This beautiful building is California's second oldest two-story brick schoolhouse. 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 / [website - cityofsuttercreek.org](http://website-cityofsuttercreek.org)

The Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation (SCCBF) is dedicated to the restoration, preservation, and development of the community's historic assets both now and for future generations. (nonprofit 501(c)3 – Tax ID #87-1825043)

**DONATE
TODAY**

SCCBF a Nonprofit, 501(c)(3) | PO Box 24, Sutter Creek, CA 95685

[Unsubscribe info@sccbf.org](mailto:info@sccbf.org)

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data
Notice](#)

Sent by info@sccbf.org powered by



Try email marketing for free today!