

Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation

October Newsletter, 2024

Early Day Travel Along the Mother Lode

In the early days, travel through what would become Amador County, was slow, tedious, difficult, and even dangerous.

The Central Hotel, established in the early 1850's, stood at today's intersection of Highway 16 (Jackson Highway) and Highway 49 south. It was a well-known stopover for travelers heading to the southern mines. It had already been a one-to-two day grind over a rough, unpaved wagon road from Sacramento City just to get this far. Here a traveler could rest, eat (if you could afford it) and maybe consume an "adult beverage" (or several) before heading south. The road to the Central Hotel – later becoming Central House – from Sacramento City was relatively straightforward.

Fairly flat grassland with few creeks to cross and no major rivers to ford made travel simple if not easy. Once you were on the southern "road" (merely just a trail) things got more treacherous.

Today you can travel from the Highway 16/Highway 49 intersection at Central House to Jackson in about half an hour. In the 1850's, you would be another 2-3 days, depending on the weather. It might be shorter if you were on horseback and you didn't get lost, robbed, or maybe even killed.



Wagon and oxen on a typical Gold Rush "road."

Traveling by wagon and team was certainly slower and more visible, but some impromptu caravans became virtual rolling arsenals, dampening the enthusiasm of some wiser highwaymen. Remember, the Mother Lode at that time was infested with bandits and bad or non-existent roads.

From the Central Hotel, the southern road next passed through Drytown. Located on Dry Creek, this town is the oldest of any size in the county. One adobe residence that is still inhabited today reportedly dates back to 1846.



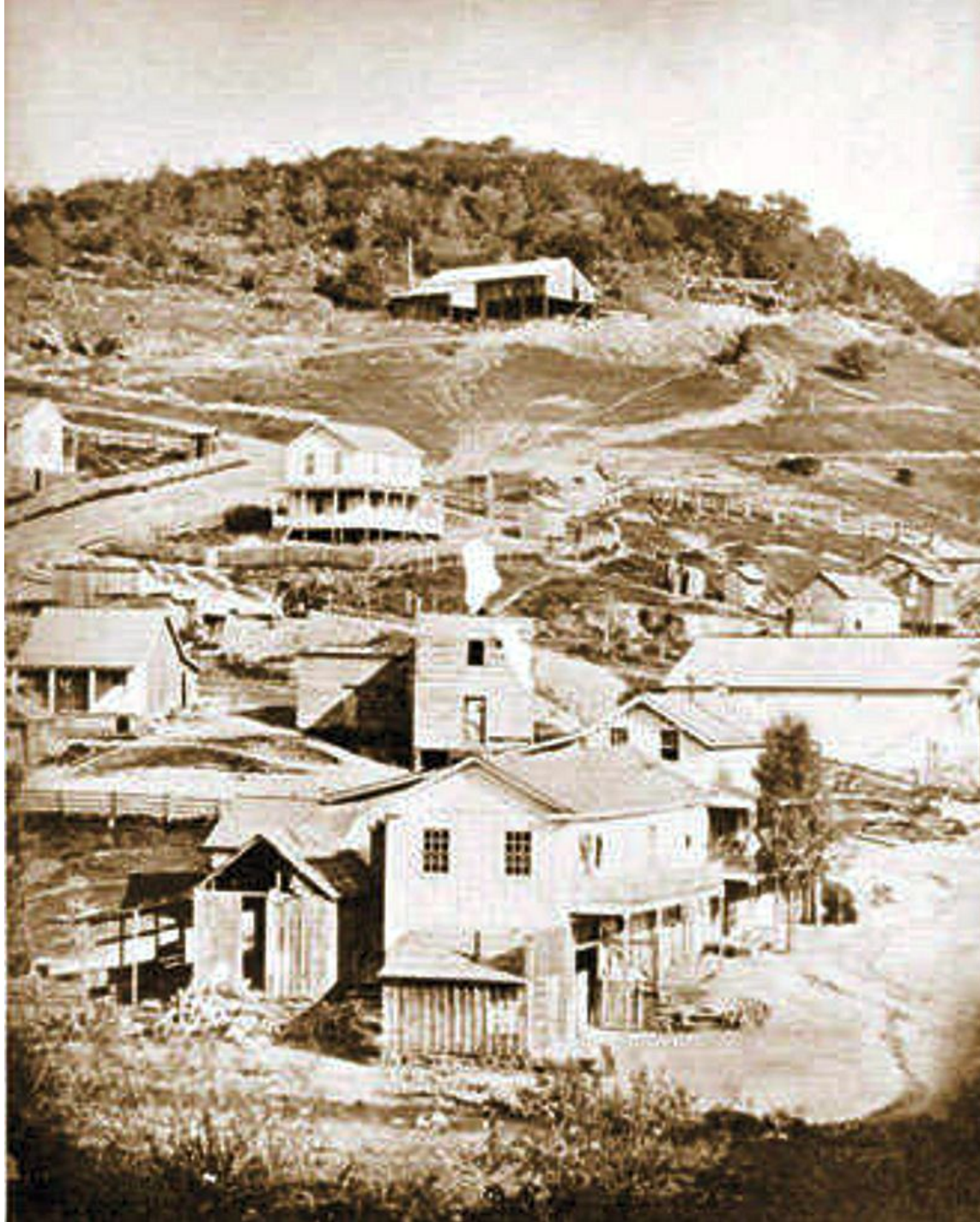
Drytown in the 1850's.

By early 1848, at least 50 people were working here, mostly Mexicans from the Monterey area. By the mid-1850's, and peaking in 1856, the town was said to have drastically increased to approximately 10,000, making it the most populous in the county. A disastrous fire in 1857 destroyed most of the town and it never really recovered.



Store and hotel in 1850's Drytown.

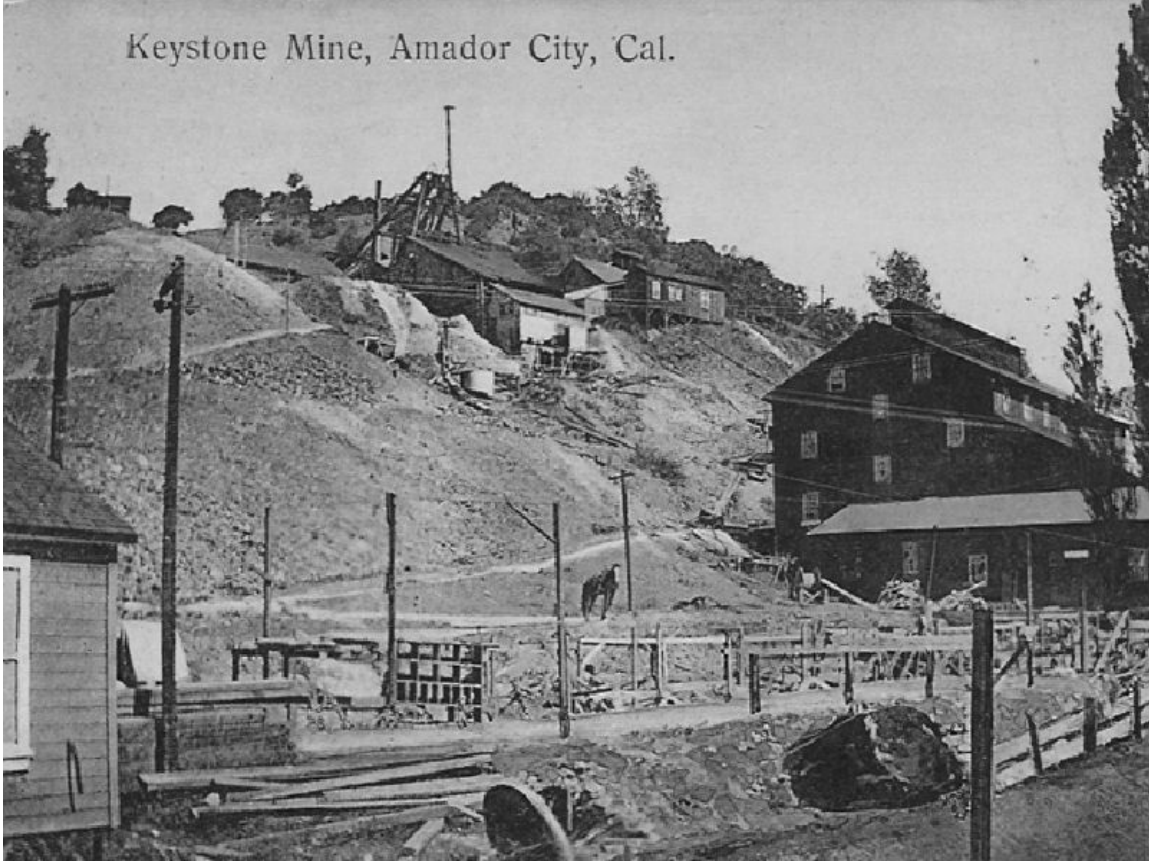
From Drytown, travelers proceeded east on the New Chicago Road to Turner Road and along Amador Creek Road into Amador City (at that time known as Amadore's Creek). The town was settled in 1851 at Amador Creek and Turner Road (then just an un-named trail) where today's bridge crosses the creek in front of the Imperial Hotel. Jose Maria Amador panned this creek in 1848 having some success. He made his real "strike" however, selling supplies he brought from his Rancho near San Ramon.



Amadore's Creek, Amador City 1850's.

Amador City was surrounded by large, productive mines-the Keystone, Original Amador, Bunker Hill, Treasure, and Fremont.

Keystone Mine, Amador City, Cal.



Miners at work near Amadore's Creek.

From Amador City you would NOT follow today's Highway 49 that goes up and over the hill to Sutter Creek. Remember, Highway 49 did not exist, so you would follow String Bean Alley or Water Street to Turner Road through New Chicago (or Herbertville). Turner Road passes the pond at Ice House and over a small hill down to Spanish Street, which was Sutter Creek's main street at the time.



Shack at the site of New Chicago.

On into Sutter Creek.



Sutter Creek's first bridge.

The first Foundry site was occupied by the old Oneto Bros. garage, today housing a clothing store, an antique shop, and a cheese shop.



Parts of Spanish Street today look much as they did in the 1850's.

Sutter Creek wasn't much in the early 1850's, just a cluster of tents, shacks, and a couple of houses.



The American House Hotel at the foot of Humbug Hill, now the Hotel Sutter (formerly Belotti's).

By the mid 1850's however, it was booming with deep quartz mines, including the Lincoln, Wildman-Mahoney, Eureka and the Central Eureka.

From here, still heading south, a couple different trails would take you over the ridge, past the Oneida Mine and the Kennedy, following the trail through "The Gate" (Jackson Gate), which today is behind Teresa's Restaurant.



Jackson Gate today.



Teresa's Restaurant at Jackson Gate.

This road becomes Jackson's main street and enters town through Chinatown on the north end of town.

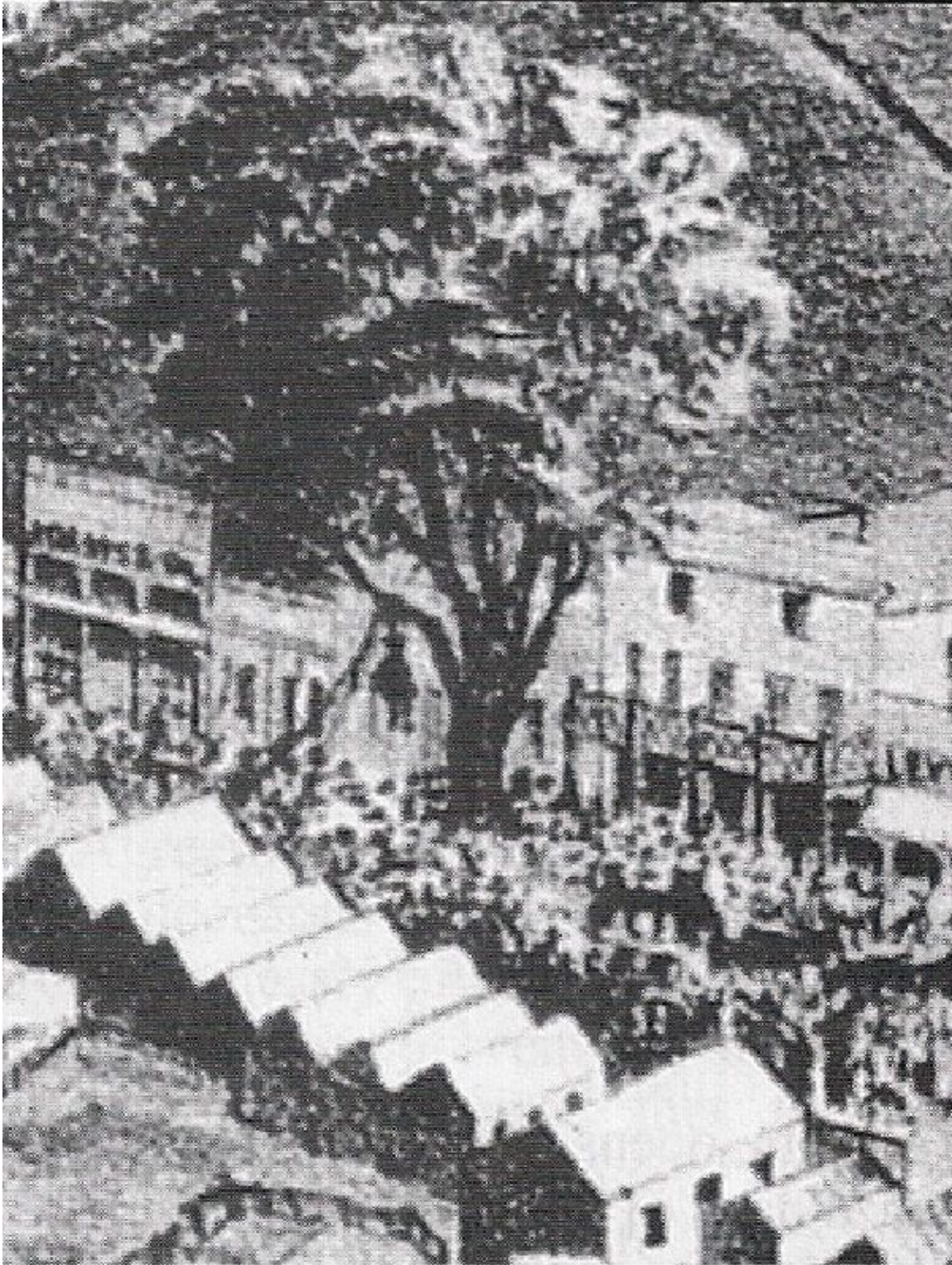
Jackson (named for Colonel Alden Jackson) grew up on the banks of Jackson Creek from humble beginnings as a water hole.



The Louisiana House in the early 1850's. Note "loungers" and rarely seen woman at the foot of the stairs.

Because of a year-round spring, the area had long been inhabited by Northern Sierra Indian tribes such as the Me-Wuk and various related tribes passing through for trade or visiting.

Also called Botilleas, for the Spanish habit of leaving bottles near the spring, Jackson was a boom town that boasted a celebrated Hanging Tree in the middle of Main Street.



Jackson's infamous hanging tree before 1862.

The giant oak was destroyed along with most of the town in the great fire of 1862.

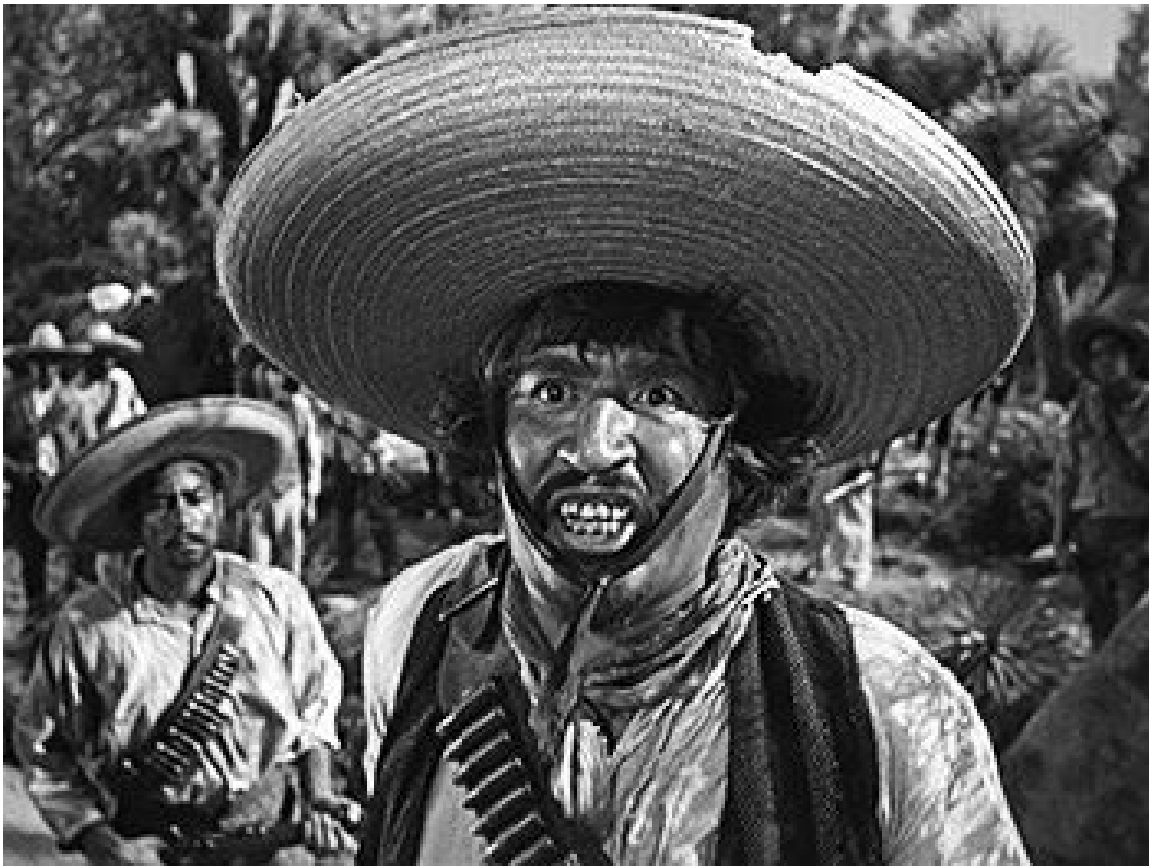
Jackson Gate Road remained the main thoroughfare into town until 1948 when the bypass realignment moved the highway to its present location passing below the headframe of the Argonaut Mine.



Today Highway 49 runs about 1/3 of the way up the hill.

Travel through the Mother Lode in the early days was certainly a challenge. Real roads were non-existent, and mere deer trails linked the few settlements.

Bandits lurked in the overgrown chaparral ready and willing to take your gold, horse, and supplies, or when that failed, your life.



"I don't have to show you any stinking badges."

Horses generally plod along at one to two miles per hour in ideal conditions. Hills, obstacles, or bad weather increased travel time 2 or 3 times the average. Things have improved!

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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



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)

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