

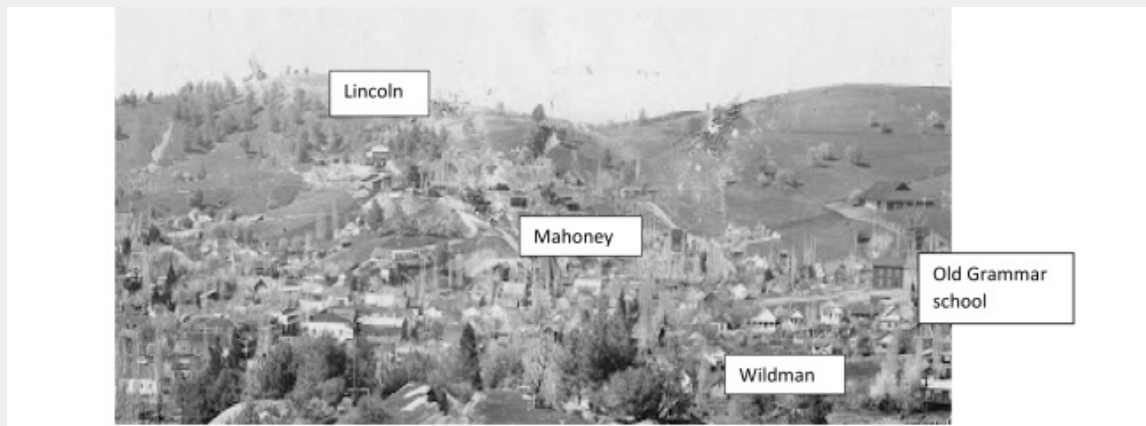
# *Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation*

December Newsletter, 2024

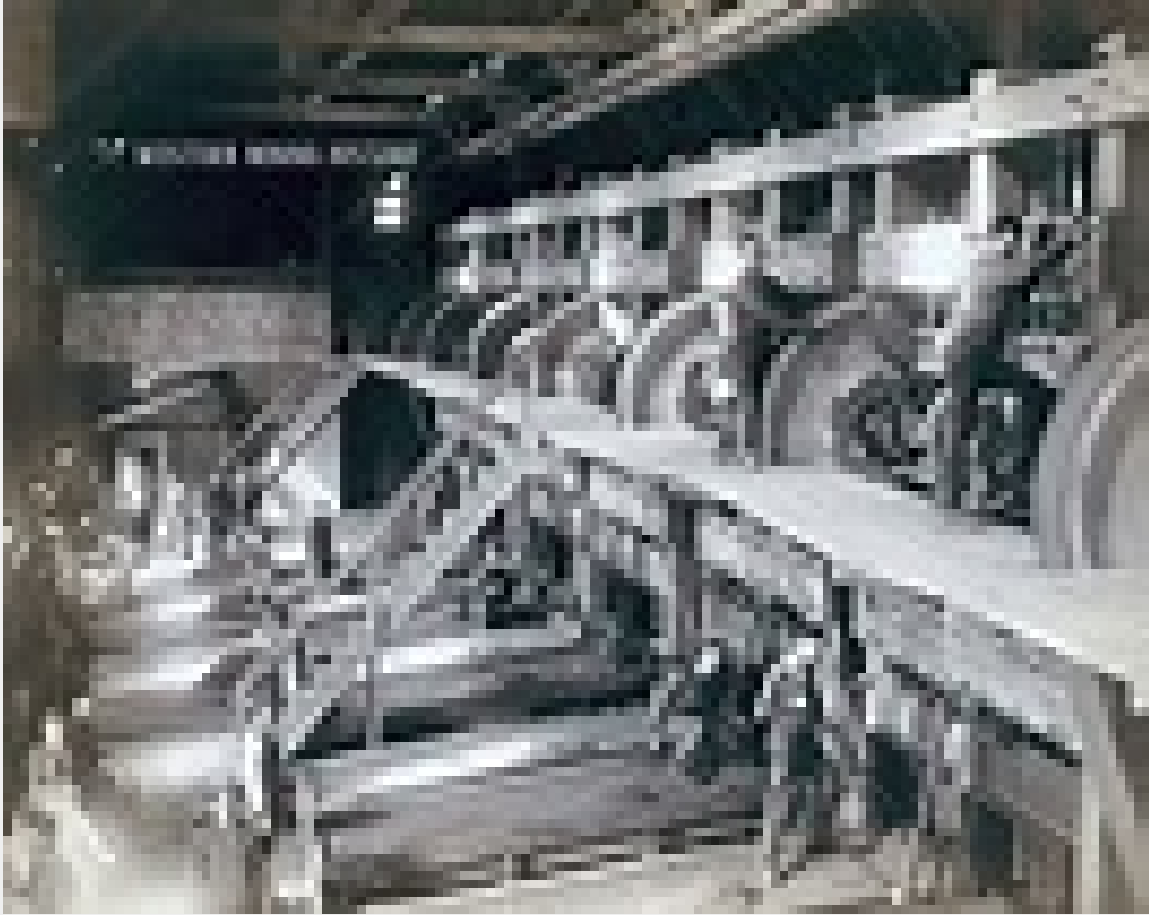
## **MORE THAN JUST A BIG HOLE IN THE GROUND Mining in Sutter Creek – Part I**

“They” say that change is one of our greatest stressors....many of us yearn for the good old days. Well, if the good old days in Sutter Creek were around 1900, we might need to reconsider. By 1900 there were no less than 5 major gold mines located within the immediate “bowl” we now consider the historic section of Sutter Creek.

Three of the largest early mines are shown clustered on the north end of the city in this picture from 1900.



The mines produced a tremendous amount of dust and noise. As many as 100 ore crushing stamps operated essentially 24-7.



Noise and dust were everywhere. Most of the surrounding trees were long gone, having been converted into fuel for the steam operated mine machinery and mine timbers. Today we would consider this to be a great nuisance, not to mention an environmental catastrophe. However, to the local residents in 1900 this was the look and sound of prosperity. It is fair to say that gold mining “made” Amador County. By 1900 there were over 900 mines in the county.

This is an account of Sutter Creek’s most famous gold mines and the people who risked their lives and fortunes in mining.



There were five major hard rock mining operations in early Sutter Creek - The Union/Lincoln, the Wildman/Mahoney on the north end of town, and the Old Eureka, Central Eureka, and South Eureka on the south end.



Recounting the history of mines is complicated by the fact that the ownership and names of the mines changed frequently.

Few mines actually operated continuously throughout their life. Ultimately, most of the Sutter Creek mines were consolidated under the Eureka Mining Company. Another thing to keep in mind are the mines production records in terms of dollars. For example, a million dollars' worth of gold in 1900 is equivalent to many times that in today's value when taking into account inflation and the variable value of gold. During the early mining period, gold was typically valued at less than \$32 per ounce compared to some \$1,600 per ounce today. It is fair to say that the real time value of the local gold mines to the State and Federal economy was enormous. In 1852, according to the Smithsonian Institute, the California gold rush produced \$81 million which is equivalent to \$3.3 billion dollars today.

## The Union Mine



Incorporated in 1851 by E.B. McIntyre, Samuel Hanford, and R.C. Downs, the Union Mine is credited as the first hardrock mine in Sutter Creek. The main operations were located on the north side of Tucker Hill along the Amador trail. This was the first water powered mill and consisted of 5 stamps. It was located on the creek near the current Badger Street bridge. The mine was purchased by Leland Stanford in 1859 and continued operations as the Lincoln Mine until finally closing in 1924.

In 1875, the Lincoln Mine was the site of one of the worst mine disasters to strike the Mother Lode. The following account was reported by the *Independent* (a local Sutter Creek newspaper).

*"On Friday morning, at seven o'clock, the day shift were let down, consisting of fifteen men, part of whom went on the three-hundred-foot, and part on the five-hundred-foot level. Those on the first were working in the stope, and three running the tunnel toward the old south shaft, which had been deserted for upwards of eight years, and was filled with stagnant water and foul air. Hardly had the drifters worked an hour when they broke through, and at first, a small volume of water rushed in and drove them out. The alarm was immediately given, and foreman Horn, with another man, went down.*

*They found William Wadge (side note - keep the name "**William Wadge**" in mind for an upcoming newsletter) and Antonio Robles almost dead from suffocation, and took them to the top. Wadge soon recovered and was taken home, while Robles suffered terribly for some hours, when he was removed, but died during the night. The*

most intense excitement now prevailed, and Superintendent Stewart, Foreman Horn, and others, commenced the work of getting to the remaining men below." (The full account from the article will be added to the SCCBF Newsletter tab titled: December 2024 - Lincoln Mine Disaster)

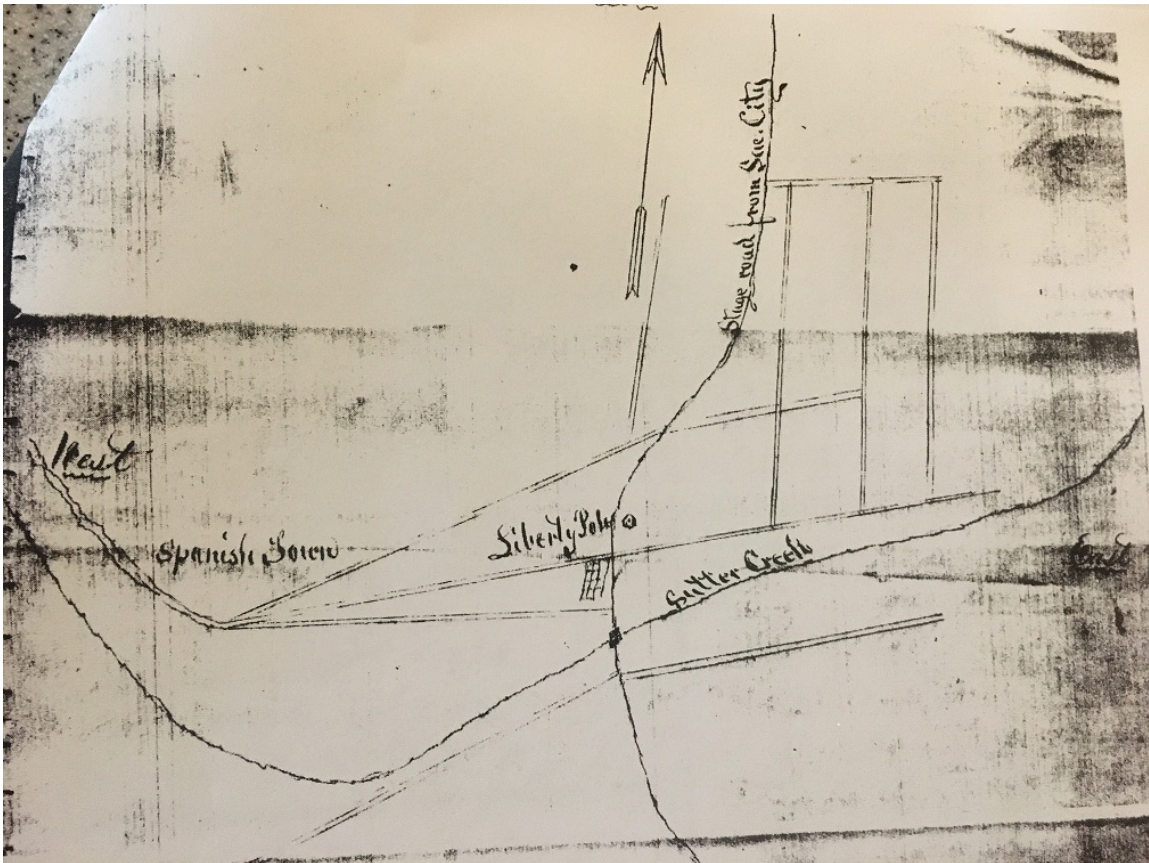
## The Wildman Mine



The Wildman mine was established by W.T. Wildman circa 1851. The mining operations were located along current Gopher Flat Road and Mill Street. Mr. Wildman was one of a small group of local businessmen responsible for the incorporation of the town of Sutter Creek in 1854. W.T. Wildman is pictured here celebrating the incorporation of the town in front of his house at the location of the current Native Sons Hall on Main Street.



The original plot map of the proposed town included a “liberty pole” designating the proposed town center. A commemorative flag pole has been installed by the Native Sons of the Golden West at the site of the original “liberty pole” pictured below. The map image is flipped west vs. east.



The Wildman and neighboring Mahoney mine (founded in 1852), operated as independent mines until 1894, when they were merged into the Wildman Mahoney Mine. In 1906, the Wildman Mahoney mine was acquired by the Lincoln mine after which all three mines were operated as the Lincoln Consolidated Mines. The Wildman Mahoney properties were operated until the Lincoln Consolidated Mines ceased operation in 1912. The combined were credited with a total production of \$5 million.

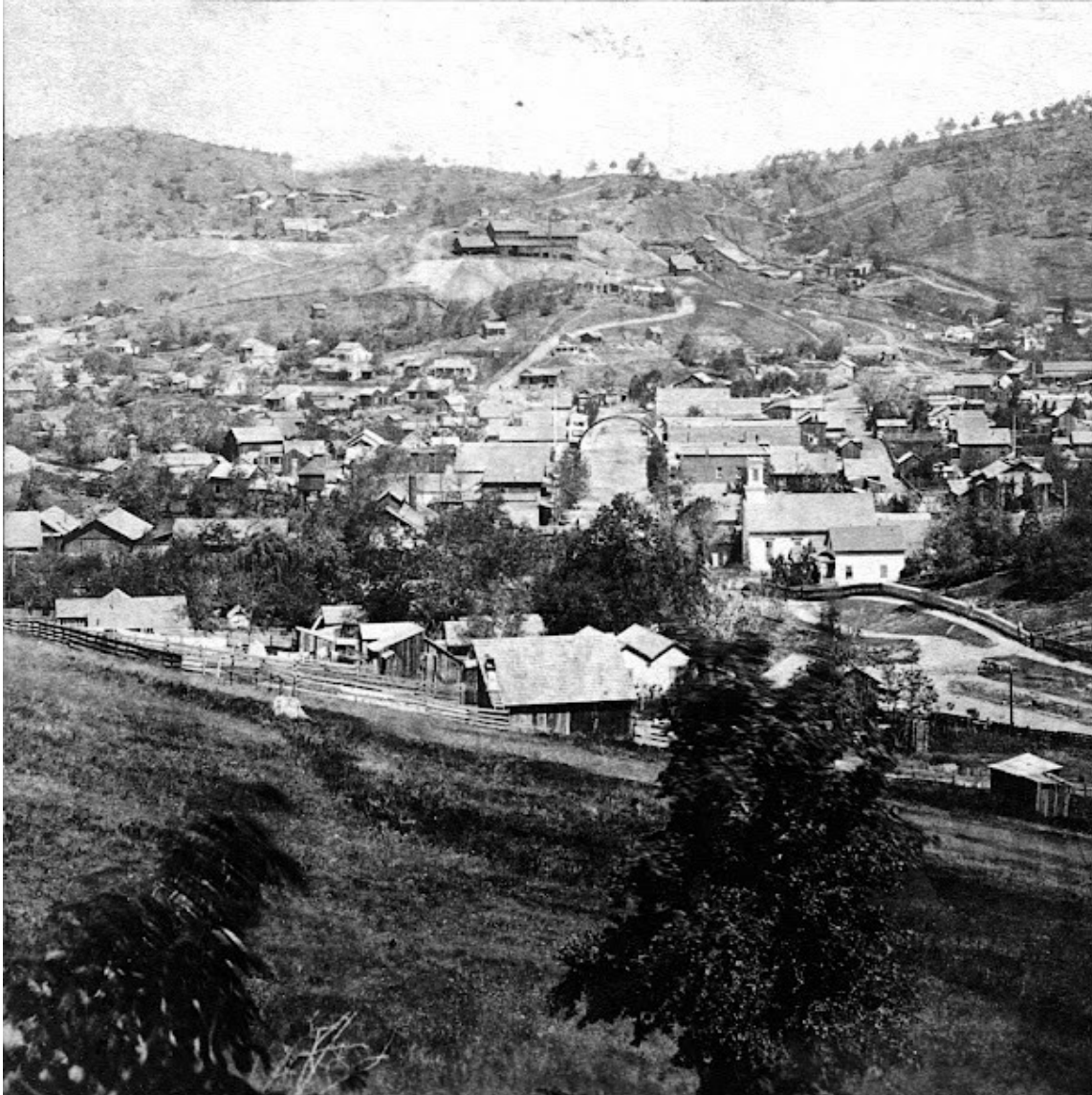
The powder house, pictured below, is still located in the post office parking lot at the base of Tucker Hill Road. The 1,500 foot deep air and waste rock shaft of the mine is located at the corner of Tucker Hill Road and Gopher Flat road, at the entrance to the post office.



## **The Mahoney Mine**

The Mahoney Mine was founded in 1852 on property purchased from Alvinsa Hayward in 1851 for \$1,000. The mine was located between Mill Street and along the south side of Tucker Hill Road. Mr. Mahoney's four brothers soon joined him from Ireland. However, all four of the brothers died from consumption within a few years. The mine was purchased by the Wildman Mine in 1894 and operated with the Wildman until 1906 when purchased by the Lincoln mining company until it closed in 1912.





*This is Sutter Creek in 1875 from the south looking north up Main Street. Notice the arch in the center, Methodist Church at lower right, Lincoln Mine complete at upper center, and Wildman Mahoney to its right.*

## **THE EUREKA MINES**

The Eureka mines consisted of three different operations: the Old Eureka, located directly south of Miners Bend Park; Central Eureka located adjacent to the Old Eureka on top of the hill; and the South Eureka generally located in the Westover Field Airport and County Corporation Yard area.

The Old Eureka was established in 1851 and began production in 1852 under the ownership of Mr. Alvinsa Hayward. Mr. Hayward owned a large house on Main Street although he spent most of his time in the Bay Area, where he is the namesake of the City of Hayward. In 1856 a new 20 stamp mill was built with another 20 stamps added in 1857. In 1859 he consolidated the Badger Mine under the Old Eureka Mine. In 1886, after the mine had attained a depth of about 2,000 feet and had produced about \$16,000,000, it was closed and remained idle for a period of 30 years. During this

time, the mine was acquired by Hetty Green (at one time the country's richest woman).

The South Eureka was discovered and development began in 1891. It was a moderate producer lying between the Central Eureka and the Oneida mines. A new discovery in 1908 rapidly increased production, leading to the construction of a new 80 stamp mill. From 1908 to approximately 1915, it was one of the largest producers in the county, employing 200-250 men. By 1917 the South Eureka had run its course and was closed. It was optioned to the Central Eureka, but never reopened. Several attempts were made to re-explore, but none deemed profitable enough.



In 1916 a new company purchased the Old Eureka property for \$500,000. About \$200,000 was spent on equipment and pumping to reopen, dewater, and rehabilitate the shaft. Several new levels were explored without finding commercial ore in paying quantities. Work was discontinued in 1921.

The Central Eureka was established in 1893 through the purchase of the Summit Mine. The main Central Eureka shaft reached a depth of 4,300 feet making it one of the deepest mines in the region.

In 1924, the Old Eureka was purchased by the Central Eureka Mining Company and operations were merged as the Central Eureka Mine. After 1930, all of the ore produced from the Central Eureka Mine came from the Old Eureka properties.

The mine operated continuously until 1942, when it was closed due to World War II, reopened in 1947, and operated until 1952.

Together the three Eureka mining operations were one of the most profitable operations in the central Mother Lode having produced over

**1,800,000** ounces of gold.

The headframe of the Central Eureka is still visible. It can be seen from Miners' Bend Park atop the hill directly to the South.



When you consider the magnitude of the local mining operations in early Sutter Creek, one cannot help but think “where did it all go”? Although the operations are long silent and their miles of tunnels filled with water, their footprints remain if you know where to look.

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Excellent resources on the history of our local mines are:

1. The Amador County Museum Mine Exhibit
2. The Kennedy Mine Exhibit
3. *Amadorgold.net/mines*
4. *Mindat.org*.

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SCCBF is funded primarily by public contributions and memberships. If you have an interest in preservation, history, or are looking to be involved in the community, email [INFO@SCCBF.org](mailto:INFO@SCCBF.org).

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# DONATE

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](mailto: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)

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