



Newsletter
August 2025

Daffodil Hill

The Blooming Legacy of Amador County

Nestled in the Sierra Foothills near the gold rush town of Volcano, Daffodil Hill is a long-cherished symbol of springtime renewal and community heritage for Amador County and beyond. For over a century, this vibrant hillside transformed each spring into a sea of brightly colorful blooms, dancing in the spring breeze, drawing visitors to witness the natural splendor. While the farm no longer is open to the public, it's story and legacy continue to this day.



The story of Daffodil Hill began in the early 1850's during California's chaotic gold rush. The property was used as a garden plot to supply greens and vegetables for local miners. The spot gradually became a

convenient stopping point for teamsters hauling timber from the Sierras to the mines as well as before descending steep Rams Horn Grade into Volcano and beyond.



Volcano, circa 1850's

Travelers on the California-Nevada trail (now known as Highway 88), over Carson Pass going both directions, also stopped here for a much deserved rest.



Boarding house and out buildings.

The property was originally owned by a Dutchman by the name of Pete Denzer. Denzer planted the original daffodils in a garden plot at the foot of the hill near the residence as a reminder of his homeland. In 1887, the increasingly popular stopover consisting of 540 acres, was purchased by Volcano residents Arthur and Elizabeth (Lizzie) McLaughlin. Inspired by Pete Denzer's beautification efforts, the McLaughlin family began increasing the daffodil population.



Walking along her new property, it doesn't take much to imagine how Lizzie was entranced by her new plantings, drawn by their vibrant, trumpet-shaped flowers with their long, green leaves contrasting against the yellow colors of the blooms and curves of the hillside. She soon found herself captivated.

The ranch continued to operate a stage stop with stables for mules that hauled heavy loads to the mines. The ranch also produced charcoal, among other goods, for the mines.



Typical mule drawn supply wagon.

The McLaughlin's also continued Denzer's boarding house business. One can just imagine Lizzie making the beds, cooking the meals, and then placing jars of daffodils on the tables. Lizzie continued tending to the bulbs, carefully dividing and adding more as the years passed.

Arthur and Lizzie had two children, Mary and Jesse, both born on the ranch. They, and their descendants, were lifelong Amador County residents and the property remains with the family today.



Boarding house in snow.

The boarding house was a 2 ½ story, 17 room structure with attendant stables and barns. Rooms were rented, animals sheltered, and homemade meals served. Breakfast would set you back 25 cents. The McLaughlin's also hosted dances on Saturday nights in the loft of their huge barn which is still in use today. Did the blooms dazzle the dancing couples of so long ago?

Daffodils have their own magic.

Arthur became the county supervisor of his district from 1894-1901. This, along with mining activities, farming, and inn keeping, kept the family in food, clothing, and supplies.



*Family on the porch (left-right)
Arthur McLaughlin?; Jesse E. McLaughlin; Anne McLaughlin, George
Lucot, Mary McLaughlin Lucot, Anne Ward, Louise McLaughlin, AB
McLaughlin & Lizzie McLaughlin on the front porch of the boarding house
at the ranch.*

Arthur passed away in 1912.

The boarding house burned down in 1922 from a defective flue. At the time, Lizzie was residing with her daughter, Mary Mc Laughlin Lucot (wife of Sheriff George Lucot) in Jackson and the ranch was being leased out to a Mr. Al Martin. (Ledger article 3/24/1922). The original bunk house and larder room was remodeled over the years into living quarters for the ranch caretakers. A small cabin was built not far from the site of the boarding house for Lizzie. That cabin retains its original condition today.

Lizzie died in 1935 and the ranch passed down to Mary, Jesse, and Ann Mc Laughlin.

A Family Tradition in Bloom

Over the decades, the McLaughlin family and their children nurtured the daffodil plantings, turning the ranch into a floral haven.



*Wagon in front of the boarding house (left – right)
George Lucot, Mary McLaughlin Lucot, Anne McLaughlin, Arthur McLaughlin,
Jesse E. McLaughlin, AB McLaughlin (standing), Louise McLaughlin & Lizzie
McLaughlin behind the donkey.*

By the time of Lizzie's death in 1935, the first visitors began stopping to admire the family's garden. Lizzie's daughter Mary and son Jesse planted more bulbs in tribute to Lizzie.



Responding to public interest, the family expanded the flower beds,

and by the early 1940s, Daffodil Hill opened to the public during the blooming season. Each year, family members planted thousands of new bulbs, with the final years seeing up to 16,000 added annually. At its peak, the hill boasted over 300,000 daffodils, encompassing more than 300 named varieties. From mid-March through April, Daffodil Hill blossomed into a vibrant tapestry of gold, attracting thousands of visitors each spring. Even then, with all the hard work (it was all hand labor) and dedication required, there was never a charge to the public to see the spectacle. Family belief was that it was for the good of us all. The ranch's rustic charm, complete with the original 1880s barn, antique farming equipment, and roaming peacocks, chickens, and donkeys, offered a picturesque setting that celebrated both nature and history.

Closure Amid Growing Popularity

Despite its popularity, Daffodil Hill faced challenges. In 2019, the Ryan family, direct descendants of the founding McLaughlin's and current owners, announced the indefinite closure of Daffodil Hill to the public, citing safety concerns stemming from overwhelming visitor numbers that exceeded the capacity of local roads and parking areas. Amador County Sheriff Martin Ryan, a family member, expressed the difficulty of the decision, noting that the site's success had inadvertently led to its closure.



While Daffodil Hill no longer opens its gates to the public, its legacy endures in the hearts of those who experienced its beauty. This multi-generational family's dedication to cultivating this local floral treasure for over a century stands as a testament to their love for the land and our community. As spring arrives each year, the memory of Daffodil Hill's golden blooms continues to inspire and remind us of the enduring connection between nature and heritage in Amador County.

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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.

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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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