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A water wheel that powered the Knight Foundry.

SUTTER CREEK, THEN AND NOW: LEGACIES OF THE GREAT CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH ERA

By Pamela & Gary Baker

Sutter Creek grew out of the great gold rush of 1849 and thousands of men of every nationality arrived seeking fortunes. E

ast coast Americans, Chinese, Chileans, Englishmen, Irish, Italians, Mexicans, Germans, and other Eastern Europeans rushed to Sutter's Mill in January 1848 after the discovery of gold.

The gold rush became a mesh of men, machines and mines.

However, not all struck it rich. Many of the first immigrants set up businesses to sell supplies.

Frank Tortorich, a local historian and author says, "Those mining the miners were the ones who made the money."

Realizing there was more money to be made providing for the miners than there was in mining itself, they

set up tents and small cabins to serve as bakeries, blacksmiths, boarding houses, mercantiles, restaurants, saloons and more.

These individuals and the miners they served would become the founders of Sutter Creek. *1

Ironically, before gold was discovered, John Sutter - after whom the creek and the town are named - originally used the cedar and pine in the surrounding foothills for fuel and lumber for his fort in Sacramento.

Although he established a saw mill known as Pine Woods, Sutter did not establish the town.

Originally driven by both placer and quartz mining, Sutter Creek evolved into one of Amador County's hard rock gold mining centers.

With this technique, deep holes were dug into the bedrock to reach

the Mother Lode.

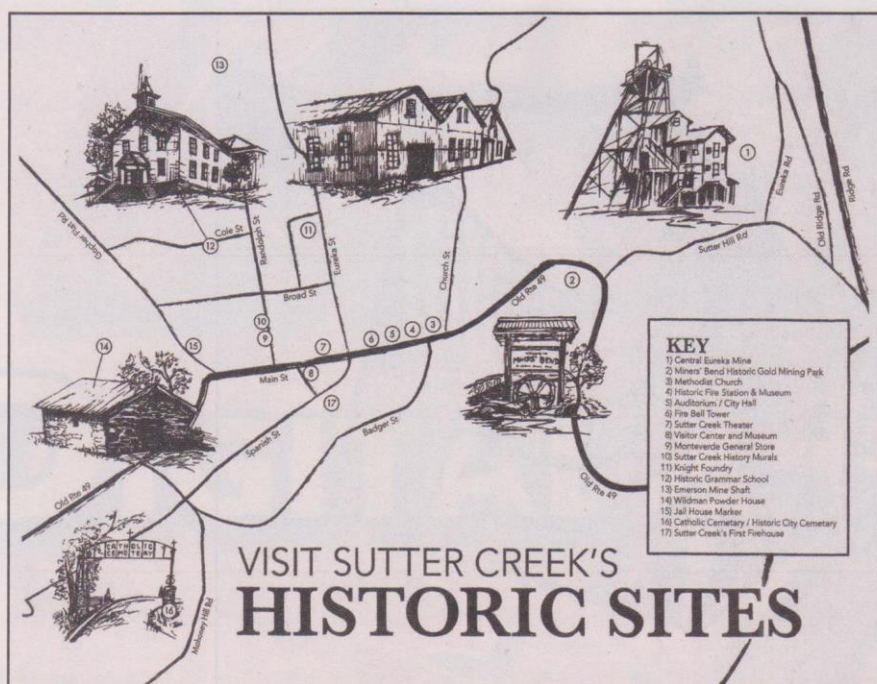
Some were dug as tunnels or inclines and others as vertical shafts that reached a mile or more into the earth in search of the Mother Lode.

By 1854, working mines were found on both sides of the town: South Eureka, Central Eureka, Old Eureka, Emerson, Wildman, Mahoney, and Lincoln.

By September 4, 1854, the town of Sutter Creek was founded. Tents and cabins gave way to churches and schools as women and children arrived.

By the late 1860's, a community of homes and commercial buildings were erected along Main Street.

All the nearby mines needed heavy equipment. By 1872, Sutter Creek was a foundry town with stamp mills running 24/7, their metal



This is a map of Sutter Creek's historical sites. All photos were taken by Pamela Baker, with the exception of this map provided by the Sutter Creek Visitor's Center.

Well preserved historical buildings reflecting the 1850's architecture line both sides of the main street today, Sutter Creek's main business district. Streets off Main Street harbor wine tasting shops, boutiques, and restaurants.

Several times fires have leveled Sutter Creek's business district; the last major conflagration was in 1888. But always the buildings were quickly rebuilt.

Today, old meets new in Sutter Creek where numerous events are hosted throughout the year. Sutter Creek's gold rush era legacy is omnipresent today, almost sensory.

Attractions, activities, and artifacts left behind by the miners abound. Some legacies of the gold rush era that visitors can enjoy in Sutter Creek include:

The Historical Walking

wheels powered by water under pressure, crushing the raw ore drilled and dug up by men and machines in the mines.

During this period, the Knight Foundry, a water powered machine shop founded by Samuel N. Knight, came into prominence by manufacturing machines for the gold mines of the Mother Lode region.

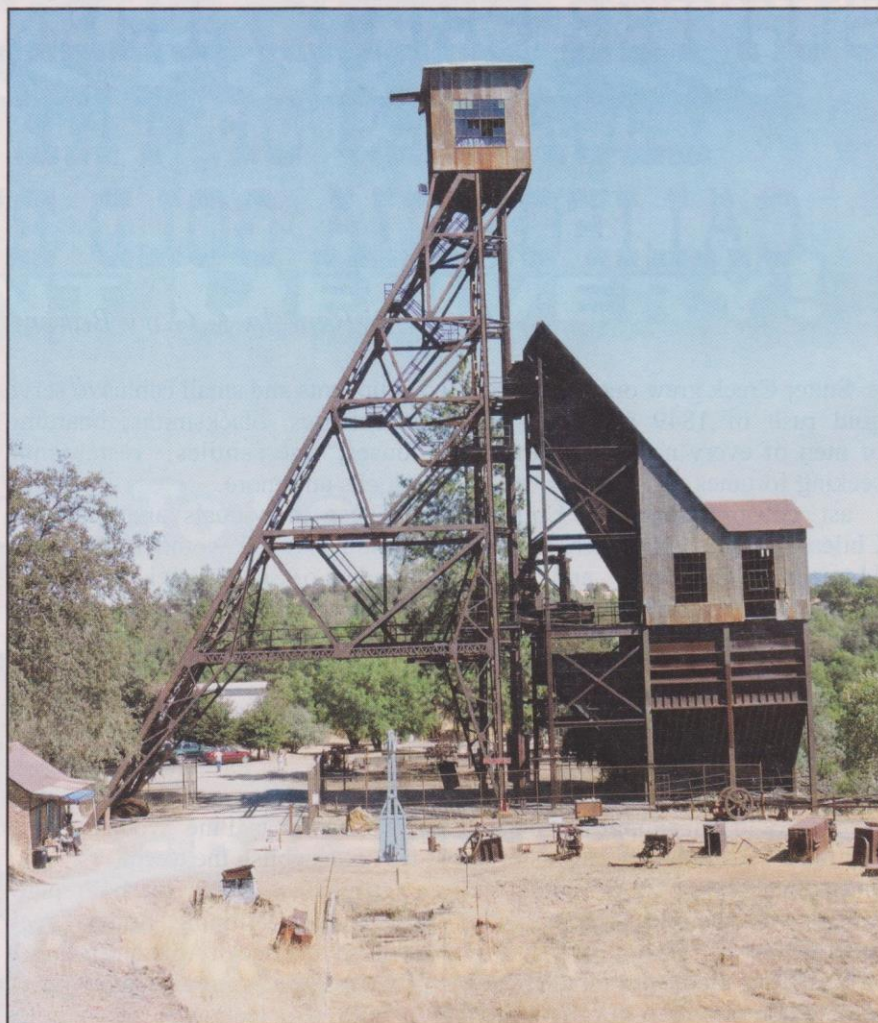
Ranching and farming sprouted nearby. By the turn of the century, Sutter Creek had become a bustling town of diverse, respectable enterprises populated by a unique blend of citizens from around the world.

Mining drove Sutter Creek's economy for nine decades, from the 1850's to the 1940's, until World War II changed everything.

The war effort needed the men in the mines and, by 1942, executive order closed the mines. They did not reopen after the war, except for Central Eureka.

Sutter Creek Now

As the Mother Lode became inaccessible, mining gave way to tourism. Main Street became a "vintage street," where wine tasting rooms and antique shops replaced the old mining oriented store front businesses.



The Kennedy Gold Mine on the Sutter Creek Gold Mine Trail.

Tour of Sutter Creek

The gold rush era's most walkable town, Sutter Creek should be explored on foot to immerse yourself in the town's history, flavor and architecture.

Pick up a detailed brochure and map from the Visitor's Center, on the corner of Keys and Main Streets. www.SutterCreek.org

This self-guided tour lets you walk through Sutter Creek's historical places of interest, including Main Street's central business district (both east and west sides), Spanish Street (original miner's residences), Eureka Street (foundry), Randolph Street (museum), and Cole Street (old schoolhouse).

You'll see a style of buildings built from brick, wood frame, and stone and concrete by immigrants from Cornwall (England), Italy, and Yugoslavia.



Quartz nuggets being moved to the stamp mill at the Kennedy Gold Mine.



The earliest headstones in the old Sutter Creek Catholic Cemetery.

The homes and business structures reflect Classic and Victorian era architecture, with overhanging porches and Gothic columns and other adornments from the 1860's.

The Monteverde Store Museum

First opened in 1898 to sell dry goods, hardware, bulk products, apparel, and fashion patterns for the early residents of Sutter Creek, history lovers will find the museum's shelves fascinating.

Still filled with lost treasures from long ago, the store itself is an antique.

Hours: Fridays 12:15 – 3 p.m. or make an appointment by calling (209) 267-0493. Located on Randolph Street.

Bend Park

Displaying 16 mining machines from Amador County gold mines, history and gold rush enthusiasts will love this outdoor memorial to the men, machines, and mines that lead to the founding of the town of Sutter Creek.

The park features a walking path with interpretive signage laid out at each machine describing how the miners worked each piece of equipment.



Shown is the Monteverde Museum Store with shelves filled with goods from the late 1800's.

The historical detail of the miner's work and descriptions of the disasters that killed hundreds of workers is impressive.

The Central Eureka Mine

Founded as the Summit Mine in 1855, the Central Eureka Mine stands as a preserved gold mine on Summit Hill.

All Amador mines, including this one, were closed in 1942. The Central Eureka reopened in 1947 and continued until its August 1958 closure.

The longest working mine in Sutter Creek, with a mine shaft that is 4,900 vertical feet deep, Eureka produced \$39 million in gold in consolidation with sister mines, Old Eureka and South Eureka.

The city of Sutter Creek received the 17-acre site of Central Eureka as a gift from private owners.

The Sutter Creek Gold Mine Trail

Mines sprinkled along this trail produced over half the Mother Lode gold. Spread over a route of 15 miles from Jackson to Plymouth, you can see the 18 mines that remain standing.

Highway 49 runs through this area, following the once narrow wagon road that originally connect-

ed the mines and towns.

The Sutter Creek part of this trail includes seven of the 18 mines - most just off the highway that weaves through town.

The Trail includes the South Eureka on Ridge Road, Central Eureka on Sutter Hill Road, Old Eureka on Highway 49, Emerson on Randolph and Cole Streets, Wildman on Gopher Flat Road, Mahoney on

Gopher Flat Road, and Lincoln on Amador Road.

At each location, observe the tailing piles, holding ponds, canals, terraces, and ruins and remains where the mine shafts, head frames, and stamp mills once stood.

The Historic Sutter Creek Cemetery Tour

Wander through these pioneer burial grounds on a self-guided tour to view the resting place of the town's early founders, identified by names and county of origin.

You'll find three cemeteries here in one location.

Established in 1854, the Sutter Creek City Cemetery is the final resting place for many of the pioneers, miners, and settlers who contributed to the establishment and growth of Sutter Creek.

The Independent Order of Oddfellows (I.O.O.F.) Cemetery also dates from 1854. The founder of the Knight Foundry, Samuel Knight (1838-1913), is buried in the I.O.O.F. Cemetery.

Immediately adjacent to the Sutter Creek City Cemetery and I.O.O.F. Cemetery, the Catholic Cemetery tombstones bear the names of many Irish and Italian immigrants.



Miner's Bend Park's statues of miners panning for gold.

The Knight Foundry

The Knight Foundry is a Sutter Creek institution. In the 1850's, the bigger, deeper gold mines needed heavy machinery. Expensive to import, mining operations relied on locally manufactured machines from foundries.

Built in 1873, the Knight Foundry harnessed high pressure water power to produce hoist works, stamp mills, water motors, electrical generators and other industrial mining tools.

The foundry had a productive afterlife as a machine shop manufacturing niche market mechanical parts until its closure in 1984.

Here you'll see unique historical equipment and machinery still in place in its original context in the original huge corrugated tin sheds on Eureka Street, as it was in its gold rush heyday. www.KnightFoundry.com

Sutter Creek School House

Schoolhouses in the gold rush era were few and far between. With its infusion of wives and children, a permanent schoolhouse was built in 1856.

Today's building, a large two-story brick structure erected in 1871, schooled 200 – 300 students, grades one through eight, from local mining towns.

Wings to the original structure were added in 1896, at the height of the industrial mining heyday. The school remained in operation until the early 1960's.

Restored in the 1980's, it was temporarily used as a community center, but is now closed, awaiting its recommission as a museum and archive.

Opposite the headframe from the old Wildman Mine's Emerson Shaft, the miner's children were educated in earshot of the constant pounding of stamp mills.

Where to Stay:

Hotel Sutter: 150-year-old landmark recently renovated in the heart of town. Onsite restaurant and cocktail lounge. 53 Main Street, Sutter Creek. (209) 267-0242 or (800) 892-2276. www.HotelSutter.com

Sutter Creek Inn: Amador County's oldest bed and breakfast. 75 Main Street, Sutter Creek. (209) 267-5606. www.SutterCreekInn.com

Where to Eat:

Sina's Backroads Café: Homemade quiche, biscuits and gravy, and much more. Breakfast and lunch. 74 Main Street, Sutter Creek. (209) 267-0440. www.SinasBackRoadsCafe.com

Cavana's Pub & Grub: Burgers, salads, and other pub food. Full cocktail bar. 36 Main Street, Sutter Creek. (209) 267-5507.

Gold Dust Pizza: For the best pizza you've ever eaten – recommended by locals. 20 Eureka Street, Sutter Creek. (209) 267-1900.

Sources:

*1. Quotes from signage narrative displayed at Miner's Bend Park, courtesy of Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation.

"Images of America, Sutter Creek," Kimberly Wooten and R. Scott Baxter, Arcadia Publishing, © 2006.

"Amador Adventure," Amador Council of Tourism, undated magazine.

Amador County, "2015-2016 Visitor's Guide," Amador Council

of Tourism.

Gold Mine Trail Sutter Creek, informational handout courtesy of Sutter Creek Promotions Committee.

"Sutter Creek in the Gold Country, Jewel of the Mother Lode," 2015, website owned and maintained by Sutter Creek Business Association and Sutter Creek Promotions Committee.

"Tales of Sutter Creek Main Street Tour, A Guided Walk Through the History of Main Street," Personal Accounts and stories from Tales of Sutter Creek © 2005, Sutter Creek Promotion Committee.


"Sutter Creek, The Jewel of the Mother Lode," Walking Tour of Historical Places of Interest, Larry Cenotto and Julie Rosenfeld, informational handout, undated.

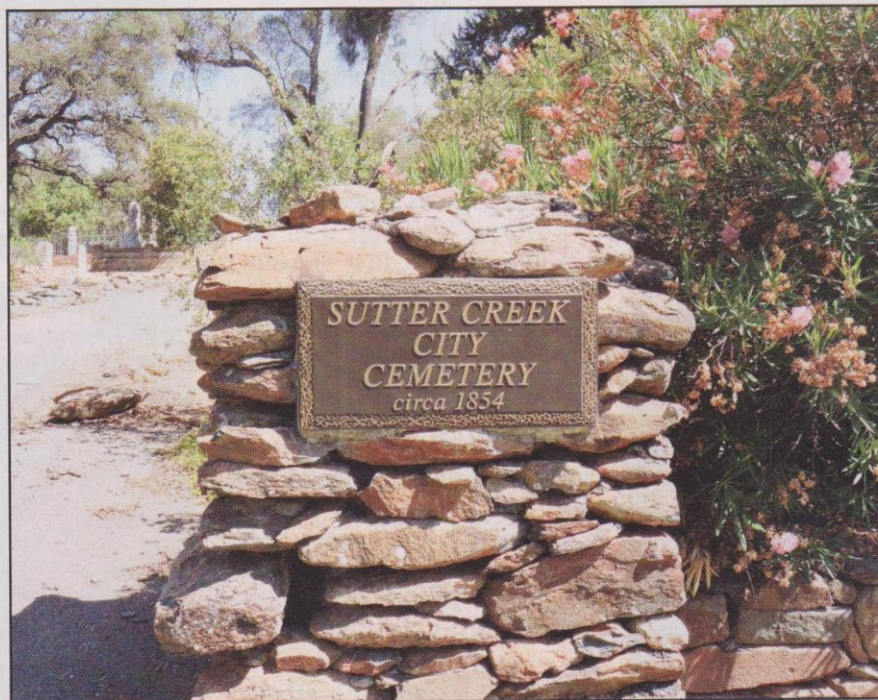
"Knight Foundry," Knight Foundry Alliance, informational handout, undated.

"Sutter Creek Grammar School," Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation, informational handout, undated.

Interview with Frank Tortorich, Sutter Creek historian and author.

Interview with Sutter Creek Visitor Center Director Lisa Klosowski.

Interview with Bob Fyock, Docent, Monteverde Museum. 



A sign in front of the Sutter Creek City Cemetery.