



Friends of the Siskiyou County Museum

spring 2021 newsletter

How the Goods Got Here

Supplying the 19th Century Gold Miners

Our quiet California backwater transformed into a bustling beehive in the decade of the 1850s. A year after the 49ers besieged the Sierra Nevada, a swarm of gold seekers came north, overrunning the river banks and filling up the gulches in what must have seemed like no time at all to the Natives. In the previous two decades, they had only occasionally been disturbed by a cattle drive on its way to Oregon, infrequent fur trappers, a couple of government expeditions passing through and small handfuls of emigrants heading elsewhere. The July 3, 1851 issue of *Alta California* reported that every major drainage in the Klamath/Trinity watershed had been prospected to some extent by the end of 1850, and by mid-1851 there were from 5,000 to 10,000 miners present, including 1,500 miners on the Salmon River alone.

A miner's needs were relatively simple but still, that's a lot of mouths to feed and shovels to haul. There were no wagon roads, just one rudimentary trail and no nearby cities to supply the goods. So how did the hoards manage to get their supplies? It happened that men with good heads for business and perhaps little tolerance for the type of hard work that mining entailed, saw the opportunity and seized it. That first winter of prospecting might have been long, cold and short on rations but soon the goods were flowing to the Siskiyou, and they got here a number of ways.

In pre-Gold Rush California there was almost no



A snag boat at work on the Sacramento River, keeping the river clear of obstacles for safe shipping. (Orland Historical Society)

industry and little agriculture other than the cattle ranching that stemmed from the Spanish and Mexican eras. There was some wheat growing that quickly expanded to feed the exploding population, a good thing since miners did love their flapjacks and biscuits. But coastal California was already linked to New England, South America and the Far East by trade ships, so it wasn't long before miners were eating Chilean beans, Chinese rice, Argentinian jerky, and Hawaiian hogs.

Transport by Water: River and Ocean

Whether freight headed to the northern mines originated in the new state or from abroad, it began its long journey on water. An exception was fruits and vegetables brought in from neighboring Oregon, a territory that was settled earlier and already being productively farmed. Most everything else was stockpiled in San Francisco or Sacramento. If goods destined for the mines had arrived by sailing ship in San Francisco, they were transferred onto smaller steam vessels to wend their way 100 miles inland to Sacramento. That short trip could take several days before the best route inland had been charted, as the delta was a maze of shifting sloughs.

Sacramento received 165,000 tons of freight in 1852, the bulk of it destined for the mines. Here local cargo could be added to the load, and smaller steamers with shallow draws continued up the American, Feather, Yuba and Sacramento Rivers, navi-

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Museum
is
Open!
Tue - Fri
10am - 3pm

Volunteers
Needed

to keep
the Museum
open!



A pack train leaving Crescent City.

(CA State Library)

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gating upriver as close to the mines as possible. The upper Sacramento was full of bends, riffles, sandbars and snags and river conditions were constantly changing. If the load was heading to eastern Trinity, Shasta or Siskiyou counties, Red Bluff was the “end of navigation” once the pesky snags had been removed upriver of Colusa.

The first steamer ascended the upper Sacramento River to somewhere north of Colusa in May, 1850. The *Jack Hayes* was an 87-foot side-wheeler built in Benicia on the San Francisco Bay two years earlier. By June she was making regular runs up the river, sometimes towing barges, carrying food, mining equipment and the miners themselves to the Northern Mines. Before long there was a plethora of boats plying the various rivers that flowed out of gold country, freight charges kept dropping and the once absurdly lucrative freight business cratered. To remedy this in 1854 most of the competitors incorporated into the California Steam Navigation Company, a near monopoly that could control freight rates.

Miners and goods traveled on larger ocean-going vessels as well. There were plenty of idle sailing ships sitting in San Francisco, abandoned by crews afflicted with Gold Fever along with the passengers. Some of these ships were pressed back into service in early 1850 to transport would-be miners north, as it was easier to access the mines on the western side of the Northern Mine region, such as along the

lower Trinity, Klamath and Salmon Rivers, by sea. With no hesitation safe harbors were sought, wharves built and new towns erected. Uniontown (Arcata) on Humboldt Bay, Trinidad and most predominantly, Crescent City (although found-

ed a year or so later) prospered by serving the miners’ needs in the 1850s, providing temporary housing, food, tools, pack animals and guides. Before long there was regular steamer service to ports up the California coast and all the way to British Columbia.

Thence by Mule: Pack Trains on the Trails

Once the goods were unloaded and prospectors disembarked at the Red Bluff or Crescent City docks, what happened next?

The miners scrambled to put together their outfits and head inland to stake their claims. But anyone owning a string of mules was in a position to make more money than all but the luckiest of miners; freight rates to the mines were exceptionally high, at least for a few short years.

A pack train was generally made up of 40 to 60 mules. For a fee of around \$40 to \$50 per hundredweight, and higher in the winter, each mule could carry 200 to 350 pounds of freight 25 to 35 miles a day. Profits dropped dramatically as more packers got into the game. Some of the packers bore names still familiar locally, such as Jerome Churchill and Augustus Meamber. “Gus” was a packer for over 30 years, including a stint as a government packer during the Modoc War.

By what route did the packers reach the mines?

Merchandise offloaded in Red Bluff had the benefit of the

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A New Walking Tour!

**Meet @
Hawkinsville Church
Sunday June 6, 9 am**

**Tour Guide:
Mike Grifantini**

**The Portuguese Experience
in Siskiyou County**

A Tale of Recent History

Memories of Horse Creek Store

by Virginia Rea

*Horse Creek Store in the 1930s.**Horse Creek Store in the 1950s.**Horse Creek Store in the 1970s.*

My dad, James Rea, was a systems analyst in computers for Chevron in San Francisco, back when computers were new and took up a whole floor, and I grew up in Oakland. But when he was 50 years old, my dad decided to follow his dream of owning his own business, and eventually he found and bought the Horse Creek Store on the Klamath River in Horse Creek, Siskiyou County, California, and became Postmaster of Horse Creek. He worked very long hours: the store was open six and a half days a week, from 7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. except on Sundays, when he took time out to go to church. My dad was usually there at 6:30 a.m. getting ready to open, and stayed until 8:00 p.m. or so, working on the books, restocking the shelves, closing the

Post Office, and completing all the other work necessary to running your own business. I'm always amused when people remark how ideal it must be to run your own business and "set your own hours;" I learned when I was 18 and he bought the store how hard it was. He would drive down to Redding every month or so to fill his pickup with groceries; it was too expensive to have them delivered. On those days, he would leave at about 4:00 a.m. and get back before the store opened if he could make it.

The store had been there in some form or another since, I believe, the late 1800s or early 1900s. It was a relatively large structure, built entirely of wood, with painted old fir floors, an attic and a basement for storage (the basement held a lot of beer; the story was that when Ted Moore, the previous owner, had the store there was a really bad flood, and people saw six-packs of beer floating down the Klamath River for a while) and little hidden back rooms that fascinated me. It contained a small dining area (only four tables, one of which was always full of my dad's paperwork) and kitchen, a back room that overlooked the river with a large table where "the guys" would gather to drink beer after work, two bathrooms, a tiny Post Office, and storage areas where my dad kept extra hardware that he sold, as well as a huge old safe that probably weighed over a thousand pounds. It was a rabbit warren, and really fun to explore.

Working in the store was a lot of hard effort, with long hours that seemed to

never end; occasionally, when my parents lived next to the store, they would be just sitting down to a late dinner after closing the store when there would be a knock on the door and my dad would open the store up to someone desperate for “milk for the baby – oh, and while you’re open, I could use a few beers, too!” There was always something happening: someone’s cows had escaped and needed to be rounded up; a group of known thieves were making their way downriver, stealing from stores as they went (all the stores called each other to alert them); roadworks kept people waiting for hours, often at the store, and we would be flooded with customers for the café; then it would empty out and we could breathe for a while. Once my mother’s sister was helping out during one of these busy times when someone informed her that an older woman had fainted. “Well, for heaven’s sakes step over her until we can get to her!” she replied. “Isn’t the Fish and Game guy here?” “Auntie, I don’t think he’s trained in CPR – unless you’re a salmon!” I snapped back, too busy carrying plates to tables to be of much use. In the summers, we often made hundreds of lunches for firefighting crews or river rafters. One memorable summer I was hired as a river raft guide, although they came to regret that; I was useless at it and once lost track of where I was and went down a rapid backwards in full view of the horrified rafters, shouting “Help!” all the way down until I could beach myself like the proverbial whale.

After the store closed, there were all the dishes to do, usually either in intense heat in the summer or the extreme cold in the winter, when you were glad to put your hands into the hot steamy water; there was no dishwasher, and all the dishes had to have an extra dip into a dilute bleach solution before the final rinse. The Post Office books had to be closed out every day, and the beer and groceries had to be restocked for the next day. But you still weren’t done: the store receipts had to be balanced as well. We also kept track of everyone’s “charges” in little books with copies that were sent out monthly for payment. The store was the hub of the community, humming with activity and people, the source for news and information and mail.

My dad loved the local history and was friends with Chester Barton, who owned the store at one point and, as I understand it, drove the mail coach down Highway 96 back in the day. My dad kept in the store lots of memorabilia and photographs that Chester had given him from those days, as well as my paternal grandmother’s appointment papers from the days when she was a postmaster in New Mexico, the trunk she used to keep her saddle in when she was a

girl growing up on a ranch in New Mexico (it had a hole in the top for the saddle horn), the flag from my grandfather’s coffin (he was a WWI veteran), and other family items.

At first, my mom Lee worked at the store, too, although she later got a job as secretary at Seiad Elementary School. One day, she was sitting at the cash register, ready to ring up a grocery order, when my dad bent down next to her to get something from under the counter; as he leaned down, he steadied himself by putting his hand on the stool my mom was sitting on, and accidentally spun it a little bit. As my mom grabbed for something to keep from falling off the stool, her hand hit the cash register; she just happened to strike the key that opened the cash drawer, which sprang open just as my dad was standing up, and the drawer hit him in the head. The customer standing there just shook his head and said, “If I hadn’t been here to see it with my own eyes, I never would have believed it was possible to do that.”

My dad’s mother came to live with us after my grandfather died. There was a little room next to the store that at one point had been a hair salon, and it was renovated to make an apartment for her. It didn’t have a bathroom, so she made the trip over to the house next to the store where my parents lived for many years every day to use their bathroom. She also volunteered to help out in the store and could often be found marking prices on canned food items, slowly but surely, as she was in her eighties by then. One day a customer watched her for a while, then shook his head and commented, “Good help must be hard to find. By the time she gets those cans marked, the price will have gone up!”

I used to come up every summer to work in the store, which helped me pay for college. As an added bonus, I was able to “shoplift” groceries to take back down to college with me, too. I met such an amazing variety of people there, and had a wonderful time; I was able to work in the store and Post Office as well as cooking and waitressing (badly) in the café, restocking items from the basement, and pumping gasoline and propane (which I hated because it scared me – I was convinced it was going to blow up), among other tasks. I loved the store and the tight-knit community, too – everyone used to help each other out. I remember one year there was a bad storm, and a flood took out someone’s barn; the community had a good old-fashioned barn raising and rebuilt it for them. There were dances at the Community Hall, and lots of other

fun activities. In those days, there were a lot of logging jobs, and the guys would come in absolutely black from logging burns, or covered in sawdust. There were also lots of Forest Service employees, a hippie commune or two, ranchers, and truck drivers who loved my mother's home-baked pies, and sometimes drove long distances to get a slice, or to buy a whole pie; she won more than one blue ribbon for her pies at the Siskiyou County Fairs.

My father ran the store and loved every minute of it, but after about 20 years, decided to retire. He finally managed to find a buyer and was in escrow. I came up to visit for Thanksgiving in 1989, and the day after, my dad was a little late getting to the store. Suddenly we were awakened by a friend of ours, who had been staying in the house next to the store, pounding on the front door, yelling, "The store's on fire! The store's on fire!" My dad got up and out the door first, and we followed a few minutes later (I was pregnant with my first child and was not so quick).

By the time my mother, my husband and I got to the store, the fire was raging; my dad had burned all the hair off his arms and face trying to put out the flames with a garden hose, and the fire was approaching the large propane tank. The volunteer fire truck and crew were trying desperately hard to keep the fire away from the propane, and they succeeded, fortunately. The fire was so hot that it melted the tail lights on the fire truck. Ironically, one way that my father contributed to his community was to fill the gas tank on the fire truck for free; he had filled it for them that week. My mother and I were crying; it was like watching someone you loved die. My dad came over to us, put his arms around us, and said, "Well, I guess we'd better make a new plan (for retirement)." He was a master of understatement, and a tough, Greatest Generation guy. We stood watching as it burned to the ground. By then, the Forest Service had also sent a truck, but the store burned so quickly no one could have saved it. Some people never paid their bills, and of course we had no way to track what they owed, but many folk came by with a check, saying, "Well, I'm not exactly sure what I owed, but here's what I think it might have been" and my guess is that they overpaid us.

Although we had suspected the cause of the fire to be faulty wiring, given the store's age, as it turned out, the store had been set on fire by an arsonist. Apparently, a young man who was mentally unbalanced allegedly roller skated from Yreka downriver, stopping in the Horse Creek Community Church to do some damage before moving on to break into the store. He then gathered everything combustible he

could find (and that's where my dad's paperwork on a café table came in handy, as well as some of the small camping propane tanks he sold) and lit it on fire. When two of the distributors, one a bread delivery man and the other the beer guy, as I recall, came by separately to deliver to the store, this young man came outside and yelled at them that they had better leave, as the store was on fire. Then, in a not uncommon act among arsonists, he stayed to serve coffee to the firefighters. As the two delivery men had seen him, they were able to later identify him and he was prosecuted, but my family derived no satisfaction from seeing the incarceration of this clearly unstable young man; he needed help, which to my knowledge he never got. I don't know if it's true, but I later heard that he died in prison at a young age, and I am very sorry for him.

The loss of the store, we discovered, was more than a personal tragedy; the store had been the gathering place for the community. Over cups of coffee, waiting for the mail to be sorted, news would be exchanged and contact made with one's neighbors. After the fire my father, ever innovative, decided to sort the mail in his living room, in beer flats, and pretty soon the neighbors showed up to pick up their mail. My mom would put on a pot of coffee and occasionally serve pie to whoever came by, and it was almost like old times. But the Postal Service decided to put in lock boxes rather than a post office, and my dad, like a lot of people, was underinsured and couldn't afford to rebuild the store. The Postal Service told my dad (who was very close to retiring) that he would have to finish up his service in Paskenta, California, so he bought a used fifth-wheel and lived there while my mother fended for herself during the long cold winter until he could retire and come home.

The store was never rebuilt, and much local history was unfortunately lost in the fire. Now, when you drive down Highway 96, as far as I know, you will see the sign for Horse Creek, California, Population 115 – the same sign that was there when my dad bought the store in 1975 – at least, it was there the last time I drove by. My mom died in 2016, and my dad in 2019. The logging industry is gone from the area, and the community is scattered throughout the valley; there is no place to drink coffee or eat pie, although my daughter and sister, and I on a good day, carry on the traditional craft of pie-making with her recipes. In these days of COVID isolation, I often think back to those days with great nostalgia. I live in hope that someday the store will be rebuilt and the community will once again have a place to gather and share their news.



*A freight wagon with trailer near Ager.
(CA State Library)*

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Siskiyou Trail. This route, pioneered by fur trappers in the 1820s following Native American pathways, crossed the Siskiyou Mountains and linked Oregon country to north central California. The trail traversed the Sacramento River Canyon, as I-5 generally does today, and was usually—but not always—passable in winter. There was a wagon road of sorts north from Red Bluff through the easy to traverse flat valley to the town of “Old” Shasta, a bustling supply center for the Trinity River mines by early 1850. Packers loaded up their mules to head north in Old Shasta, now a State Park on US299 just west of present-day Redding.

But the Siskiyou Trail wasn’t the only choice. From Old Shasta an alternate trail north, the **Trinity Trail** left from nearby French Gulch, crossing Scott Mountain into Scott Valley as CA Highway 3 does today. This route more conveniently served the Salmon River and Scott Valley mines in the summer months but too much snow usually prevented winter travel.

From the new raw North Coast harbors, it was a different story as there were no known trails heading inland. Yet only weeks after the new coastal towns were established, trails were being hacked through thick redwood forest, again utilizing old Indian routes. The **Trinidad Trail** went straight up the coast from the Trinidad harbor to Big Lagoon, then turned east to cross the coast range via Bald Hills, reaching the Klamath at Martin’s Ferry near Weitchpec. That first year, 1850, prices for shipping freight to the Klamath and Salmon Rivers were prohibitively high, even up to \$2 a pound. Four years later this trail was shut down due to pack trains being repeatedly attacked by provoked Natives, leading to the Red Cap War of 1855. Eventually troops were posted at Elk Camp up in the Bald Hills, and “traffic” resumed.

Crescent City was well positioned to serve both the Klamath River mines and the mining districts in Oregon’s

Illinois Valley and Jacksonville, where gold was discovered in late 1851 by miners pushing north from the Klamath River. The **Cold Springs Mountain Trail** connected the port of Crescent City to Southern Oregon’s Illinois Valley (“Sailor Diggings”) and then went on to Jacksonville. At its peak (1853-1854) 500 mules per week headed out

the trail from Crescent City. Goods that came into Jacksonville could then be sent south over the Siskiyou Mountains to Yreka and Klamath country via the Siskiyou Trail. From the Illinois Valley, **The Waldo-Happy Camp Trail** branched off of Cold Springs Mountain Trail, near today’s Grayback Road (Happy Camp, CA to Waldo, OR), crossing the Siskiyou to reach the Klamath River at Happy Camp.

The **Kelsey Trail**, also emanating from Crescent City, was built a little later, in 1855. It was scouted out with the specific goal of finding a shorter and more direct route to get provisions to the army fort established at Fort Jones in 1852. Merchants and packers not associated with the army were anxious to use the proposed trail as well. And going the other direction, miners would be sending gold to Crescent City for shipment to banks in San Francisco. This was referred to as “taking out.”

A man named Ben Kelsey was contracted to build the trail. Coincidentally, Kelsey was the man who in 1852 had been hired to clear out snags in the Sacramento River below Red Bluff, as mentioned above. He had also participated in the Bear Flag Revolt (his wife Nancy stitched the flag), was one of the founders of Uniontown (Arcata) on Humboldt Bay, and most significantly, was a notorious Indian killer, a sad tale for another day.

The planned route was nearly 100 miles long but was still 75 miles and several days of travel shorter than the already established pack trails that served our area from the coast. Kelsey hired a crew of Chinese and knocked out the trail west from Crescent City to the Klamath River at Ferry Point in one season. The government contracted for a ferry at this river crossing. The section between Scott Valley and Ferry Point, completed in early 1856, crossed the Marble Mountains. It’s likely there were separate winter and summer routes.

It is unclear whether the army paid for any of the trail to

be built, but it is known that merchants and citizens on both ends of the trail helped raise some of the funds needed for construction. The fort was abandoned in 1858 and although the Kelsey Trail's glory days were short lived, it continued to be used for decades, even as some of the other routes were morphing in wagon roads.

The exact routing of the old Kelsey Trail is unknown in places, and undoubtedly there were many alternate routes, branches and shortcuts. For example, Gus Meamber, who by the mid-50s lived at his ranch west of Fort Jones where his pack animals were stabled, started his trips on the Kelsey Trail by going up Shackelford Creek, while the main trail went up what is now called Kelsey Creek further down the Scott River. It took Gus 19 days to reach Crescent City. Today, many sections of the Kelsey Trail are popular for hiking and backpacking.

Rough Roads: From "Packing" to "Teaming"

Once the miners and merchants arrived, wagon roads appeared around flat Shasta Valley and across Scott Valley as far as Callahan in short order. But where the topography started to rise there were only trails for a time.

The first effort made towards a serviceable wagon road to and from the county was what came to be called the **Lockhart Wagon Road**. From Red Bluff it took a northeastern loop via the Fall River Valley then back northwest to and across Military Pass on the east slope of Mt. Shasta and into Shasta Valley. The work was begun in 1851 but those first builders were killed by Indians. Twin brothers Sam and Harry Lockhart, who had opened a saloon and hotel in the earliest days of Yreka, resumed the project using a team of oxen in 1856. Struggles with hostile natives continued to plague this road and safe passage was never a sure thing.



New Book Announcement



This wonderful full color hardcover children's book tells the story of our own Hallie Daggett. Hallie was an independent strong-minded woman who became the first female fire lookout in the US Forest Service in 1913, at a time when women were only hired for "office work." Hailing from the Salmon River country, she was educated in San Francisco but returned to Siskiyou County where she loved to hunt, fish, ride and shoot.

Purchase at the Museum Store for \$16.95

Meanwhile the Siskiyou Trail coming down from Oregon and the two pack trails connecting to Red Bluff, the Trinity Trail and the Sacramento River canyon portion of the Siskiyou Trail, were being improved enough for wagons filled with freight and coaches carrying passengers to make the trip with relative ease. Seventeen bridges were built in the Sacramento Canyon by the **Stone Road Company** (named for the builders) on this now state-franchised toll road. Goods still had to be packed into Salmon and Klamath River country and other remote areas for many more years but no longer was it a pack trip of 100 or more miles.

This was the freight wagons' time to shine. These behemoths, long and narrow with 6' tall rear wheels, might carry 15' tall loads weighing 6 or 8 tons and sometimes pulled a trailer (the so called "back-action") as well. All of the mules

A Stage Stop on the trail over the Siskiyou, Barron's Mountain House still stands a few miles south of Ashland, OR.

Friends of the Siskiyou County Museum

a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit, EIN 82-1833303

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Board Meetings: Second Tuesdays @ 10am

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- 20 or more for the largest wagons - were controlled by a single rein and were encouraged to keep up the pace by cursing, whip-cracking teamsters. Still, on a very steep uphill grade a team might go only 40 or 50 feet before needing a break.

In Crescent City the business community was busy selling stock in the **Crescent City Plank Road** and Turnpike Company to finance an improved toll road replacing the Cold Springs Mountain pack trail. In wet areas this road was "paved" with wooden planks. It opened in May, 1858 and Crescent City remained a busy trading center until the late 1860s. Today remnants of the old plank road can be found outside of Crescent City along Howland Hill Road.

Express Companies

There was one type of "freight" that was almost as precious as gold, and that was mail. Keep in mind that there was no postal service at all for the first couple of years after gold was discovered here. A post office opened in Yreka in August, 1853 but it was many years before the smaller towns got them.

So how did people communicate? This is where the "express companies" came in. Yes, a slow-moving pack train could carry a bag of correspondence but there was a better way. Expressmen riding horses and

unincumbered by heavy freight were the fast and efficient way to send letters and gold dust out of county and get incoming mail and coveted newspapers to far-flung mining camps. Then there were the "express and passenger trains," faster than normal pack strings carrying only people and mail.

And when the pack trails became roads, the "express box" became a fixture on passenger-carrying coaches, as any western film fan knows. © Jill Livingston

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