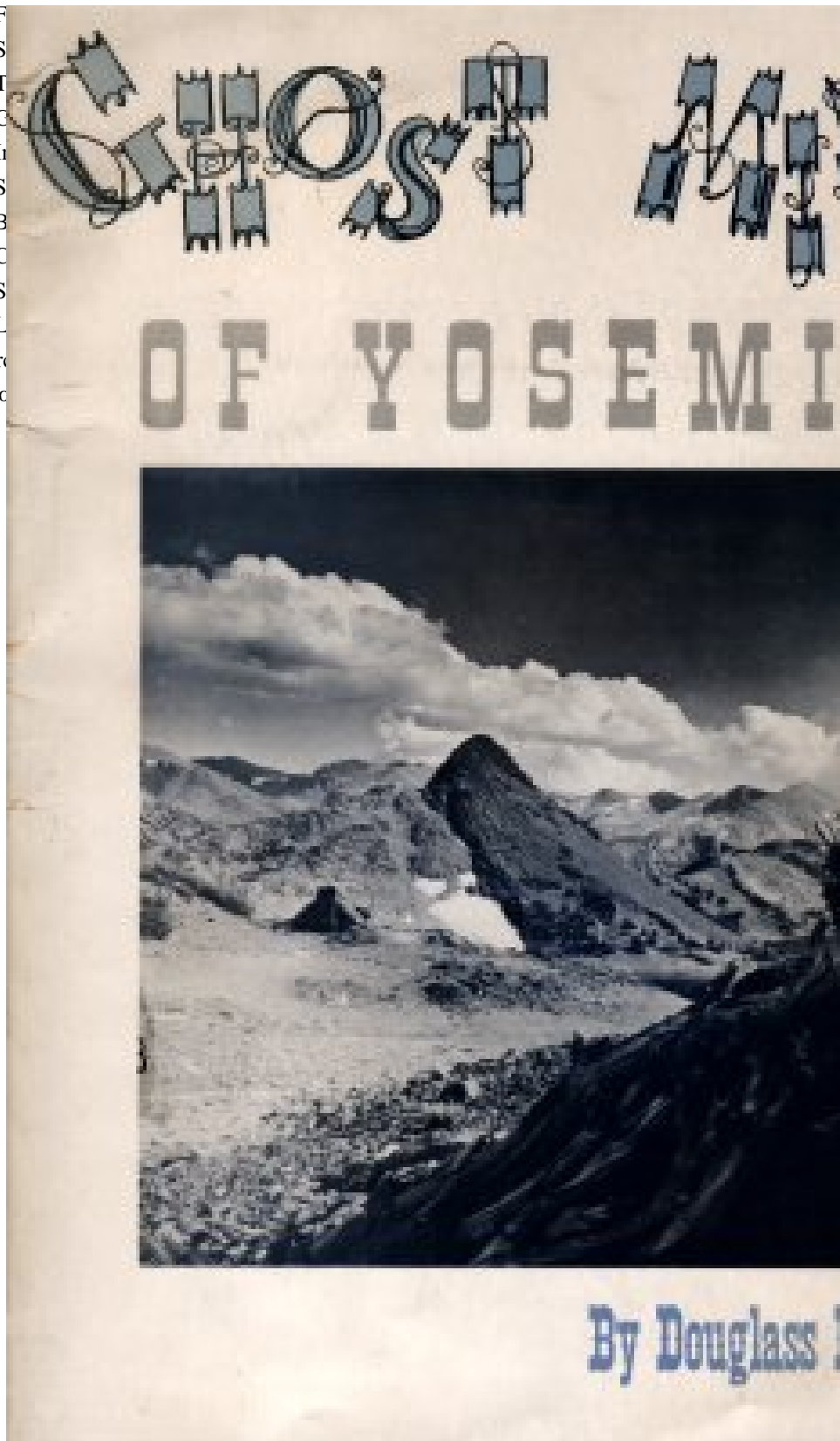


---

## *Ghost Mines of Yosemite* (1958) by Douglass Hubbard

- Cover
- 1. Fortune
- 2. Discovery
- 3. Speculation
- 4. Explosion
- 5. Eloquent Editor
- 6. The Men
- 7. Consolidated Silver
- 8. Tunnel
- 9. Machinery
- 10. Avalanche
- 11. Bennettville
- 12. Ah Wee Died Three Times
- 13. F
- 14. S
- 15. T
- 16. C
- 17. I
- 18. S
- 19. B
- 20. C
- 21. S
- 22. L
- Sour
- A No



---

### About the Author

For biographies about Douglass Hubbard, see

- John Bingaman, *Guardians of the Yosemite* (1961), p. 114.
  - Allan Shields, (PDF) "Whatever Happend to Doug Hubbard," *Yosemite Association* (Spring 2003), pp. 8-11.
-

## Bibliographical Information

Douglass H. Hubbard (Douglass Hopwood Hubbard) (1918-), *Ghost Mines in Yosemite* (Fresno, California: Awani Press, July 1958), Copyright 1958 by Douglass Hubbard. LCCN 58033853. 38 pages, unnumbered. Illustrated. 28 cm. Bound in white paper wrappers with a black and white photograph on the front cover and illustration on the back cover. Library of Congress call number TN433.C2 H8.

Also available in a gray hard cover with a dust jacket and folding color park map (not in soft cover edition). Reprinted 1971.

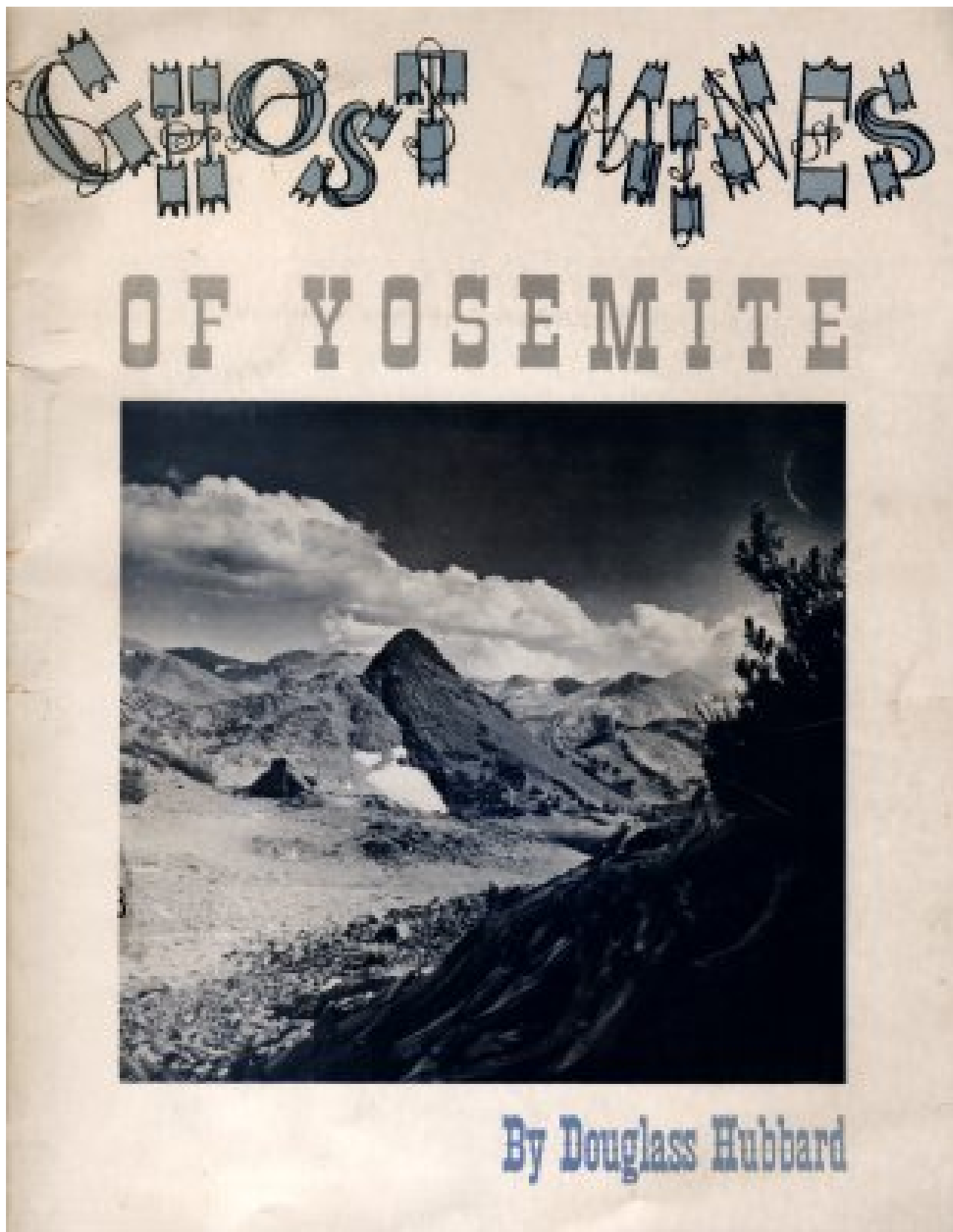
Digitized by Dan Anderson, May 2006, from a copy at San Diego Public Library. These files may be used for any non-commercial purpose, provided this notice is left intact.

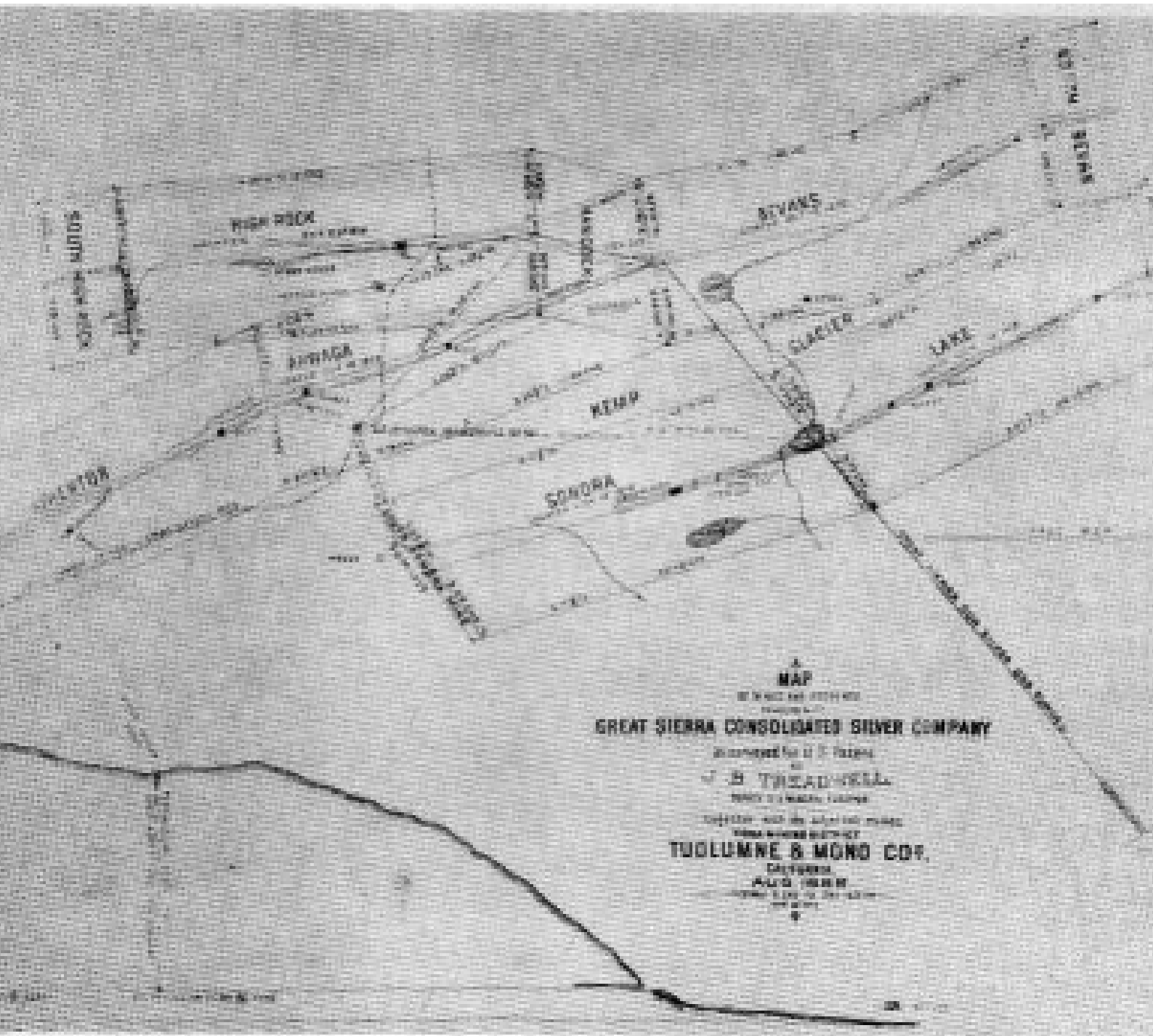
—Dan Anderson, [www.yosemite.ca.us](http://www.yosemite.ca.us)

---

Next: cover

---





COVER: GREAT SIERRA CABIN, TIOGA HILL  
LOOKING SOUTH DOWN CREST OF SIERRA NEVADA

Printed in the United States of America  
By The Awani Press  
Post Office Box 1971, Fresno, California  
All Rights Reserved

## GHOST MINES OF YOSEMITE

BY DOUGLASS HUBBARD

*Chief Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park*

With Photographs by the Author



OUTCROP ON THE “THE GREAT SILVER BELT”, TIOGA HILL

## 1. FORTUNE

DO YOU know where a fortune lies buried? In Tioga Hill, the old timers say. The Shepherd Tunnel, driven more than 1700 feet through some of the world’s hardest rock, was thought to be less than 200 feet from the fabulous Shepherd Lode when work stopped suddenly in 1884. A value of twelve and one-half million was placed on surface ores by Captain Bickford Anthony. Charles Barney, who engineered the Great Sierra Wagon Road (called the Tioga Road today), cautioned the Board of Directors of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company to play down the true value of the company’s holdings on Tioga Hill, lest the stockholders believe them to be gross exaggerations.<sup>1</sup> These men, competent mining engineers, were but two of many to inspect the mineral values of “The Great Silver Belt” running from Tioga Hill to Bloody Canyon, along the Sierran Crest. Almost without exception reports have been enthusiastic, yet pay dirt has not been struck to this day, in spite of hundreds of thousands of dollars expended.

Who were these men? How did they come together? Why did they fail?

Copyright 1958 by Douglass H. Hubbard

---



TIOGA PASS ENTRANCE, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

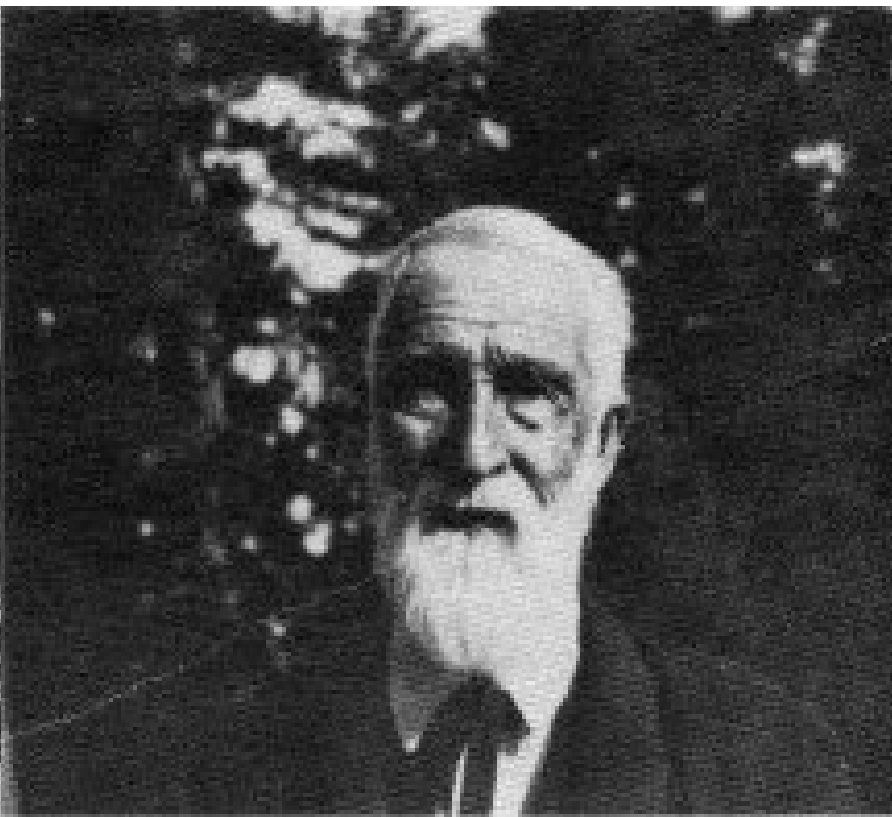
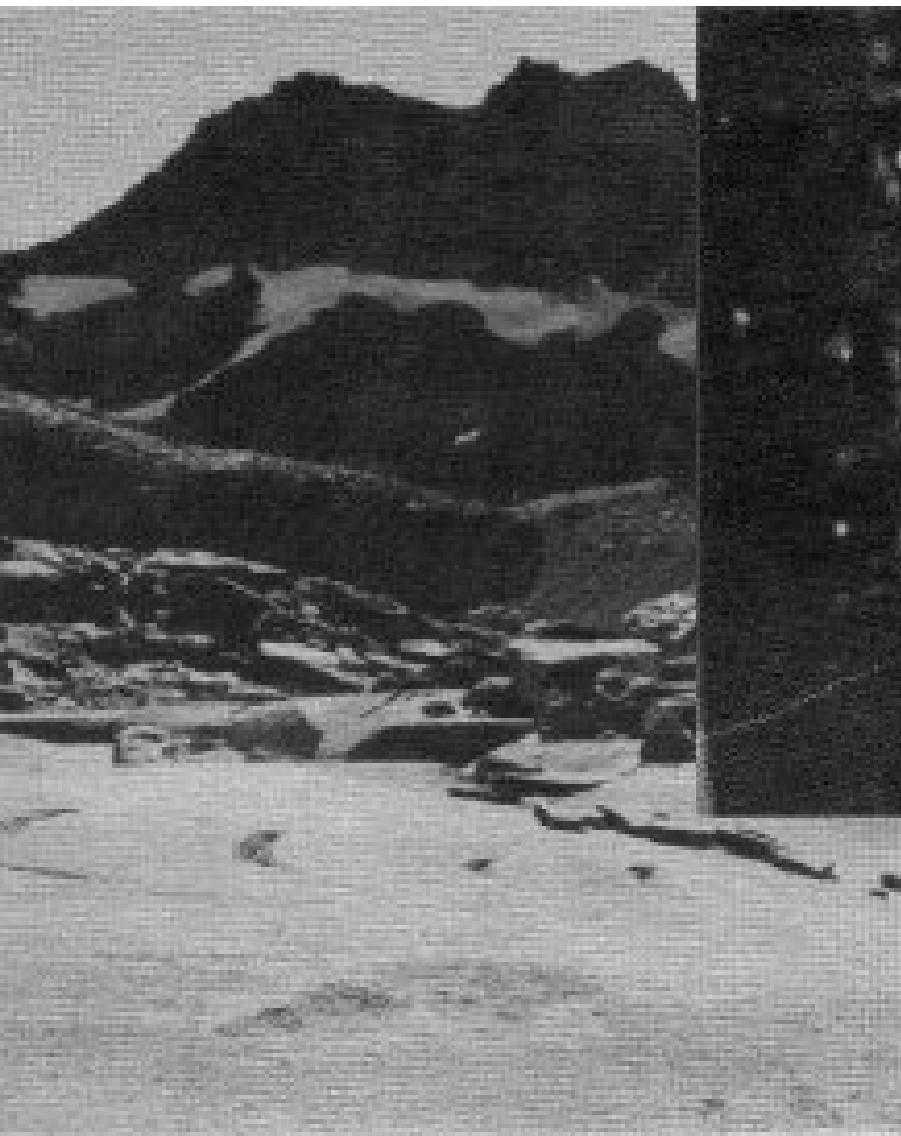
## 2. DISCOVERY

TIOGA HILL lies in the Sierra Nevada about one mile northwest of Tioga Pass. Along its crest runs the eastern boundary of Yosemite National Park, and through its twisted and glacier-carved rocks runs a snow-white quartz—the mother lode of The Great Silver Belt.

There are several tales told about the discovery of The Shepherder, most famous of these lodes. One goes like this: Early in 1860 Michael Magee, justice of the peace at Big Oak Flat during flush times in that camp, Captain A. S. Crocker, of Crocker's Station, L. A. Brown, a surveyor, "Doc" George W. Chase, a dentist, and Professor Joshua E. Clayton of Mariposa were prospecting in the vicinity of Bloody Canyon. They camped near Tioga Pass to rest their animals and to look around. Clayton and Chase had been to the Mono Diggings the year before, and in returning home Chase crossed Tioga Hill and discovered the Shepherder Lode. He may have been the first human to see its immense proportions. He kept mum about his discovery except perhaps to Clayton, who assayed his ore. While the 1860 party was camped at Lake Jessie (called Tioga Lake today) at the eastern base of Tioga Hill, Doc Chase remarked that if they could spend one day more there, he would locate and claim "the biggest silver ledge ever discovered". Next day, while the others remained in camp, Chase, armed with a pick and shovel and a small tin can, struck out northward at daylight and ascended Tioga Hill by about the same course as the trail which now leads from the Great Sierra tunnel to the old works of the company on the hill. Reaching the Shepherder Lode where it crosses a shallow ravine under a small lake, Chase unsoldered the can, straightened it out, and on the inner side scratched out his location notice with his knife. This he placed between two rocks on the massive croppings. Carrying as much ore as he could, he returned to camp. Next morning the party separated;

GLACIER POLISH, SIERRA NEVADA

CAPTAIN A. S. CROCKER



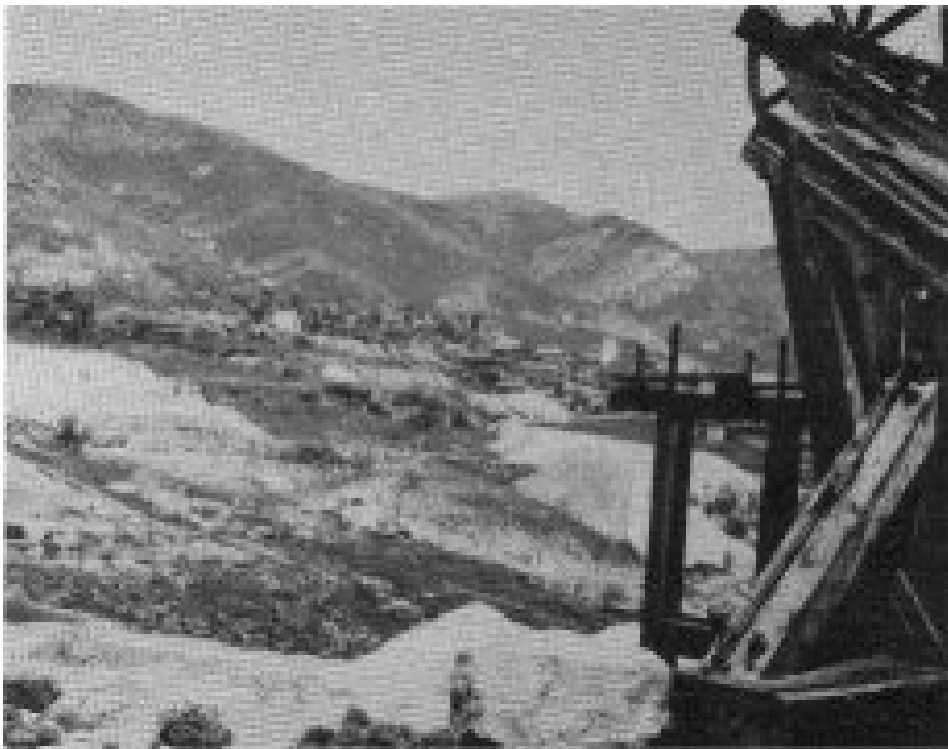
Magee and Crocker returned to their homes, while Brown, Chase and Clayton swung around by Bloody Canyon to Monoville, where Clayton had his assaying outfit. Had they crossed Mount Warren Divide and come down Lake Canyon they may well have discovered the rich croppings which later became the May Lundy Mine.

At Monoville they were to test the Tioga ore and Clayton was to devise a plan for a smelting furnace. But simultaneously with their arrival at Monoville there came in some men who had struck rich rock at what later became Aurora, Nevada. They had come over to get Clayton to make some assays. These ran so high that forgetting "the biggest silver ledge ever discovered" Clayton packed up his assaying outfit and the three started for Aurora. All made money as they followed new strikes. None returned, yet they never ceased telling their mining friends about the "thundering big silver ledge" on Tioga Hill.<sup>2</sup>

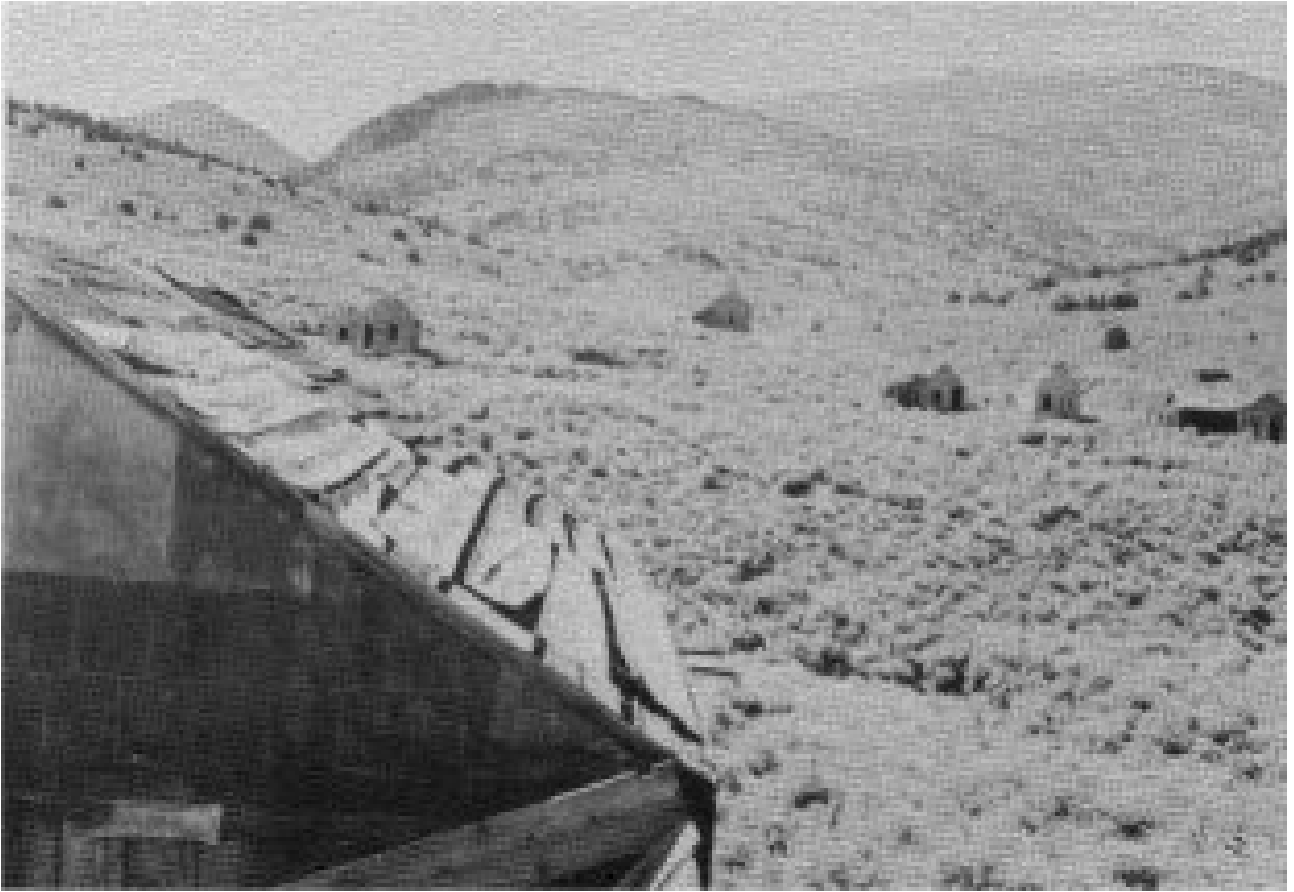
The news of a big silver ledge at the summit of the Sierra spread through Tuolumne and Mariposa counties in a short time, but soon passed into tradition amidst the excitement incident to the opening of the rich mines at Virginia City and Aurora. In 1874, as the story goes, 14 years after Chase's discovery, the Shepherd Lode was rediscovered by William Brusky, Jr., a boy from Sonora, Tuolumne County, who was tending a large band of sheep on Tioga Hill for his father. A rusty pick and broken shovel and the tin notice of location were found just as Dr. Chase had left them, except that the shovel had been almost destroyed by rust, and the location notice was illegible except the words, "Notice, we the undersigned" and the date 1860. Young Brusky had heard of the tradition and had been keeping on eye open for the ledge. Elated as he was when he made his discovery, he was disappointed when he returned home with samples of the ore. This his father pulverized in a mortar, panned, and pronounced worthless. The following summer, 1875, Brusky sank a small hole in the ledge and procured some better-looking ore. But still no one in Sonora would take any interest in it until the winter of 1877 when someone assayed the rock and found it to be rich in silver. Then everyone wanted to be in on the find.



MAY LUNDY MILL, SINCE DESTROYED BY FIRE



VIRGINIA CITY, NEVADA, (1956)



AURORA, MARK TWAIN'S OLD HOME, IS A GHOST TOWN TODAY



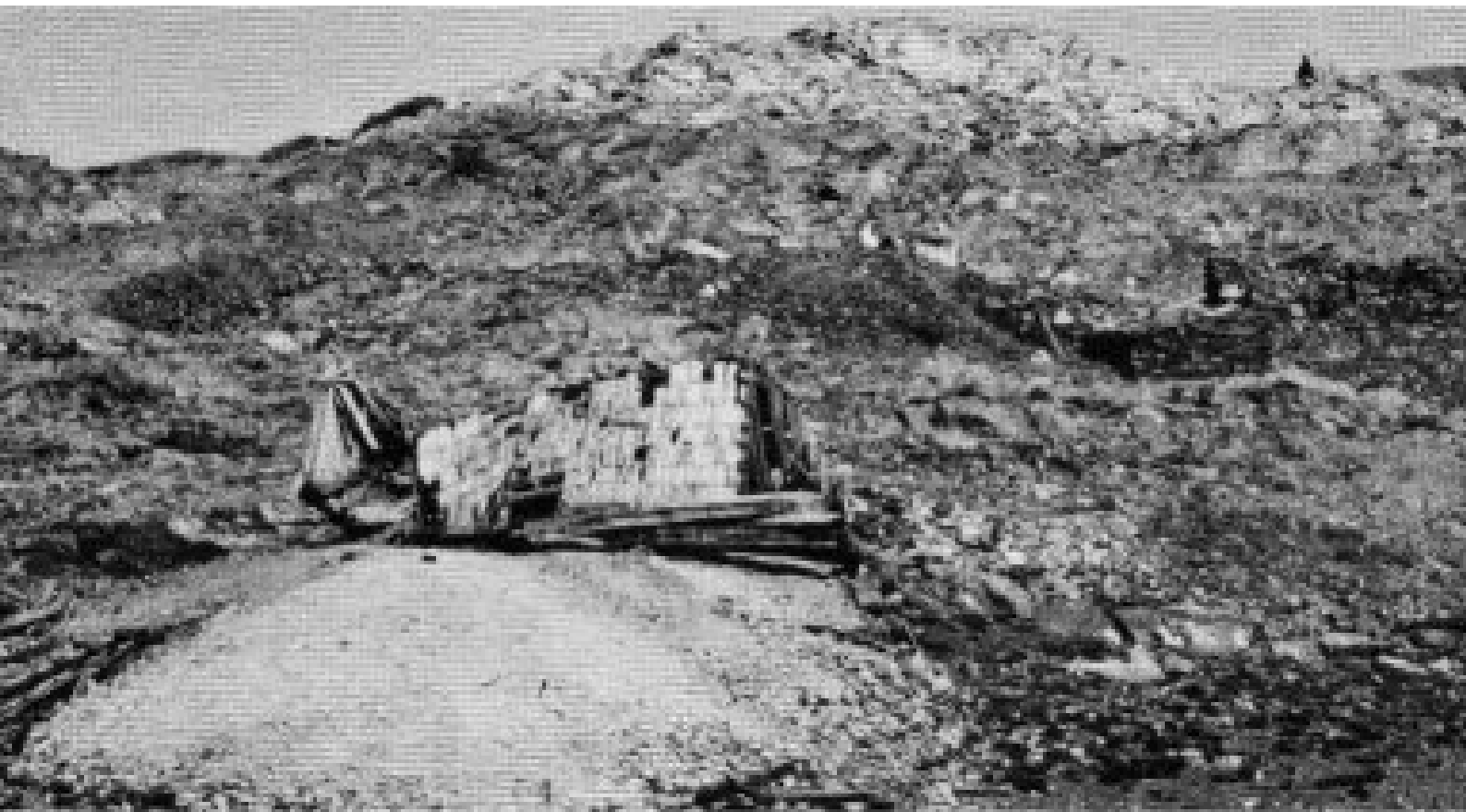


DOOR, GREAT SIERRA CABIN

In 1878 Brusky again returned to Tioga Hill and on the second day of August located four claims of 1500 feet each along the Sheep herder Lode, naming them the Tiptop, Lake Sonora, and Summit. All of them were subsequently purchased by the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company. Young Brusky committed suicide on August 28, 1881.

Paralleling the Shepherder Lode some 800 feet to the south is the ledge known as The Great Sierra. Among its mining claims are the Bevan, Ah Waga, Hancock, Atherton, and the High Rock. Perhaps the most important of these is the latter, site of the old village of Dana. Located originally by W. W. Rockfellow in October 1878 as the High Rock, it was later called the Mount Dana and finally the Great Sierra.<sup>3</sup> Here, amidst unrivalled Sierran grandeur, stands a beautiful old stone cabin (see cover). Constructed of loose slate by an unknown craftsman, it is a masterpiece of dry-rock masonry. Its dirt-filled walls and heavy hand-made wooden door provided protection for many a miner when biting winds whistled across Tioga Hill.

A few yards to the north of the cabin are other buildings, now in ruins, nestled around two shafts—on inclined prospect shaft or the white mother lode, and a double compartment shaft which had been sunk 100 feet when summit work was abandoned.



#### DANA VILLAGE LIES IN RUINS

Both shafts are water-filled now, and the horse-drawn lifting winch is rusting nearby. The Great Sierra hoisting works have succumbed to the elements such as the Homer Mining Index reported on November 12, 1881:

**LUNDY, Nov. 12** — The wind was so terrific on Tioga Hill Wednesday night that it burst in the doors of buildings, and would have doubtless carried away the shaft house at the Great Sierra Mine but for the support given the buildings by the substantial gallows frame of the hoisting works.

Dana was going to be a real town. According to reports, “A postoffice has been created on Tioga Hill, to be known officially as Dana, and Frank W. Plains appointed postmaster; but Frank is down in Yosemite Valley for the winter and the emoluments of the office (\$12.25 a year) don’t appear to be sufficiently attractive to induce him to climb 27 miles up the mountain on snowshoes to qualify.”<sup>4</sup>

---

### 3. SPECULATION

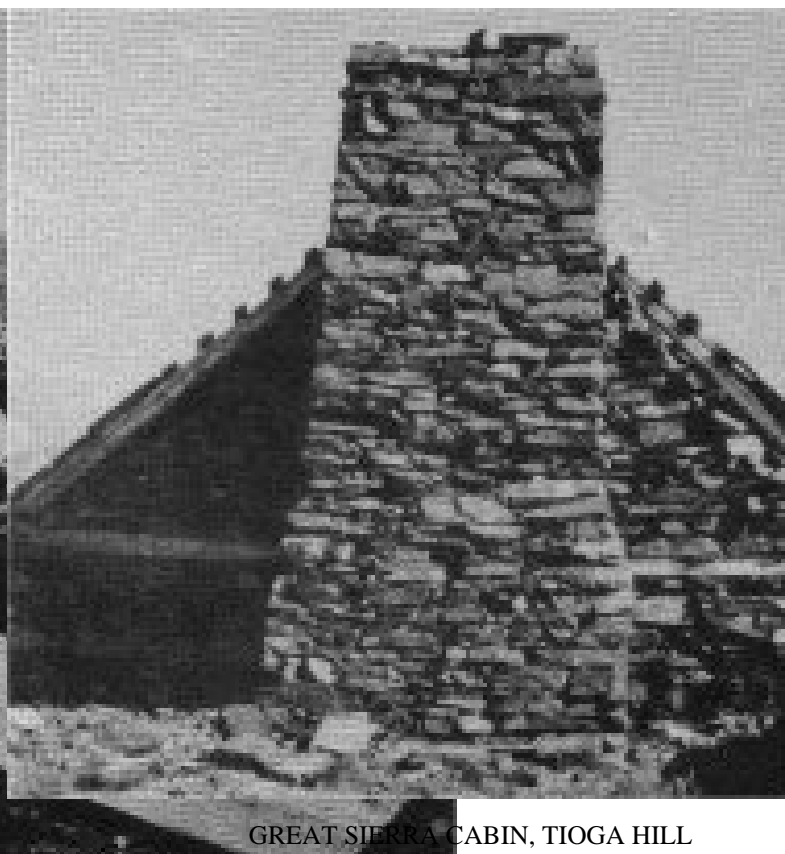
EXCITEMENT RAN HIGH on Tioga Hill during these times and claims were changing hands like cards in a poker game. Shortly before his untimely death Brusky and several of the Sonora friends who owned the adjoining claims on the Sheepherder Lode attempted to incorporate as The Consolidated Lake, Summit and Sonora Claims, while the High Rock was transferred to the Mount Dana Mining Company and then to the Great Sierra Mining Company, both California corporations.<sup>5</sup>



LIFTING WINCH, DANA VILLAGE



GREAT SIERRA HOISTING WORKS



GREAT SIERRA CABIN, TIOGA HILL

---

#### 4. EXPLOSION

LITTLE IS KNOWN of the operations of the Great Sierra Mining Company, predecessor of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company. Set up for a winter-long operation at Dana on Tioga Hill in 1881-82, it had substantial buildings, a good supply of food and other essentials.

The miners had their ups and downs but more were up than down on November 17, 1881:

**LUNDY, Nov. 19** — A frightful accident occurred at the Great Sierra Mine, Tioga District, about 11 a.m. on Thursday last, by which three men were seriously, one probably fatally injured. It is the old, old story of thawing frozen nitroglycerine powder on a stove. A short distance east of the shaft and not far from the blacksmith anvil stood a large box stove, which was usually kept glowing with heat. In, on, or about this stove someone placed six sticks or cartridges of frozen Excelsior powder, for the purpose of thawing it out for use in the crosscut on the 100 foot level as the day shift came up for dinner. . . . While James H. Kickham of Lundy, the company carpenter, was near the stove, the blacksmith was further off and near the anvil, and George M. Lee was still further away in a corner of the blacksmith shop near the forge, the powder exploded with a terrific crash, tearing away the outer wall of the blacksmith shop and knocking the men senseless. Kickham was severely and probably fatally injured, receiving a ghastly wound on the head, several lacerations of the arm and body, and being literally torn to pieces about the pelvic region. The blacksmith was also severely injured, receiving several cuts and bruises about the head and body, and possibly some internal injuries. George M. Lee was at first thought to have escaped injury further than temporary shock from the concussion, but when our informant left, 15 minutes after the explosion, Lee was suffering great internal pain. Charlie Benson was dispatched to Lundy for medical aid, making the trip in four and a half hours, on foot without snowshoes, and most of the distance (about 11 miles) through snow waist deep. On his arrival, a dispatch was sent to J. C. Kemp, resident manager of the Great Sierra Company, who was in Bodie at the time. That gentleman at once engaged Dr. D. Walker to go to Tioga to attend the wounded. It was found impossible to obtain a team, however, until 2 o'clock the next morning, at which hour Mr. Kemp left Bodie and drove Dr. Walker to Lundy, arriving here at daylight. Early yesterday morning Moreno's caravan of pack mules, unloaded, was dispatched to Tioga to break a trail through the snow, and Dr. Walker . . . followed soon afterward.

**Nov. 26, 1881** — At last account James H. Kickham, George M. Lee, and Benjamin Martin, the three men injured by the powder explosion at the Great Sierra Mine last week are doing well, and all of them are recovering rapidly. George M. Lee is able to be around as usual, but cannot be induced to sit down, even when engaged with writing. (The fragments of the demolished stove struck George in the rear, below the belt, and numerous.) Kickham received between 150 and 200 wounds from the fragments of the stove and a large tin can that sat on top of it, and is scarified on the left side from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. . . . A piece of the tin can, rolled into a solid projectile was driven into Martin's skull about two inches above the eye, and was pulled out by Dr. Walker by main strength; but, strange to say, the skull was not broken. A mule, standing near the building at the time of the explosion, had a large hole torn in his breast. Dr. Walker reached the scene of the accident on the evening following its occurrence, after a most fatiguing climb of more than a mile up the steep mountain, up to his neck in soft, fresh snow and in the dark and immediately proceeded to dress all of the wounds, including that of the mule, for the doctor is as good on mules as he is on men . . . 6

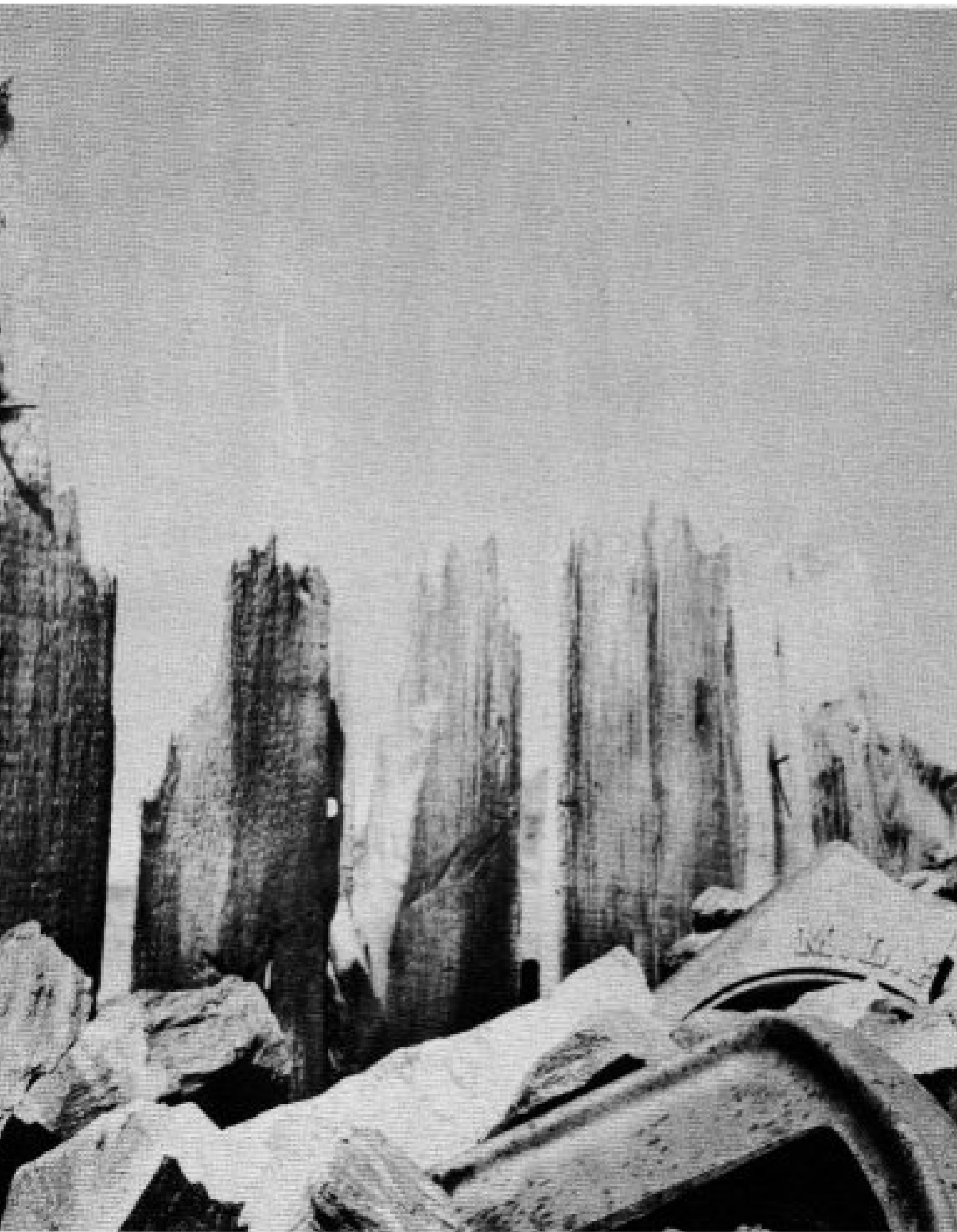
By the end of two weeks Kickham, who lost the sight of his injured eye, had recovered enough strength to be transported to Lundy by five of his companions on a stretcher built over "Norwegian snowshoes"—skis.

Upon this sled-stretcher Kickham was placed at daylight Monday morning, and the volunteers started with him for this place, Lundy, a distance of about 11 miles, involving ascent and descent aggregating fully 12,200 feet reaching here at dark the same evening with the wounded man feeling fresher and perhaps stronger than any one of the strong-limbed but now exhausted giants who had left the summit with him in the morning. 7

The Great Sierra Hoisting Works is down, amidst the ruins of Dana village, but the visitor today can see mute testimony to this tale of suffering in the pieces of the cast iron stove lying about the ruins of the old blacksmith shop, at the summit of Tioga Hill.



POWDER HOUSE, BLACKSMITH SHOP ON SKYLINE



RUINS OF BLACKSMITH SHOP, GREAT SIERRA MINE

---



“LYING JIM” TOWNSEND

## 5. ELOQUENT EDITOR

THE STORY of the Tioga mines would have been veiled in obscurity had it not been for the help of “Lying Jim” Townsend and one or two other of the mining camp newspaper editors. At a time when almost everyone was busy making history, these few were recording it. Gold town newspaper editors were a peculiar breed and those at Lundy were no exception. They had to operate under the most difficult of conditions and be ready to move type, press, and paper with the mining booms. They could be soft: one scribe was constantly championing the large trees around Lundy Lake which he thought were being felled at an alarming rate. Or they could be hard: “We have taken hold of the *Index* for the purpose of making a living. We are not here for our health. We expect that every man who makes his living in the district will assist this paper to some extent.”<sup>8</sup>

One of the most fabulous of these early editors, James W. E. Townsend, was known as “Lying Jim” to friend and foe alike.

Townsend may or may not have been the inspiration for Bret Harte’s “Truthful James” and there is no way of knowing how many stories Mark Twain may have swiped from him, but there is no doubt that the *Homer Mining Index*, of which he was sometime editor, was one of the best of the gold camp weeklies. Lundy was nestled against the east face of the Sierra Nevada some five miles west of Mono Lake. From here the *Index* was in a position to publish events of such nearby towns as Bodie and Aurora, in addition to its own news. It is practically the only remaining record of the excitement which took place in the Tioga Mining District, along the crest of the Sierra, in the late 1870’s and 1880’s.

Jim turned out good copy, but he was not above inserting a yarn of questionable veracity now and then to liven things up a bit. His philosophy may have exposed itself when he remarked in an *Index* column, “It requires inventive genius to pick up local news here now. The scribe has to trust to his imagination for facts and to his memory for things which never occurred.”<sup>9</sup>

Townsend must have been a character worth knowing. His influence upon other members of his profession in a time of dog-eat-dog was considerable. No little space was devoted to his escapades by other editors, even in papers with which he was not connected. The *Virginia Chronicle* (Virginia City, Nevada) in May 1882 carried the story of Townsend’s remarkable career:

James W. E. Townsend the gentleman who is making the local department of the Reno *Gazette* sparkle these days has led a remarkable life. From information imparted by him to his friends while he lived on the Comstock, we learn that he was born in Patagonia, his

mother, a noble English lady, having been cast ashore after the wreck of her husband's yacht, in which they were making a pleasure trip around the globe. She was the only person saved. After the birth of her son, and September having arrived (there being an "r" in that month) she was killed and eaten. Jim was saved out as a small stake and was played until his twelfth year against the best grub at the command of the savage tribe for fattening purposes. Then he escaped on a log, which he paddled through the Straits of Magellan with his hands, and was picketed up by a whaler and taken to New Bedford. At the age of 18 he entered the Methodist ministry and preached with glorious results for ten years, when he went to the Sandwich Islands as a missionary to the Kanaka heathen, and remained for twenty years. Then he reformed and returned to New York and opened a saloon, which he ran successfully and made a large fortune. In an evil hour for himself, but to the world's advantage, he tried his hand at journalism. Fifteen years of this reduced him once more to poverty and preaching. For thirty years longer Mr.

# The Homer Mining Index.

LONDON: WINDY COUNTY: CALIFORNIA: SATURDAY, AUGUST 4 1884.

<p><i>The Mining Index.</i></p> <p>OF ATYRE RETURNED.</p> <p>A. FORDHAM.</p> <p>AND PROPRIETOR.</p> <p>Building, Corner of B</p> <p>Street, London.</p> <p>OF THIS IS CONTAINING</p> <p>mail (single) ... 25 cts</p> <p>... 50 cts</p> <p>... 1.00</p> <p>REPRODUCTION.</p>	<p>LAKE HOUSE,</p> <p>MERRY, CAL.</p> <p>181 The Foot of the Lake.</p> <p>THE NEW ESTABLISHMENT FOR</p> <p>... and professional board and</p> <p>... .</p> <p>A SPECIALTY OF THIS HOTEL.</p> <p>In the ... and ...</p>	<p><i>The Homer Mining Index.</i></p> <p>is devoted to the</p> <p>INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE</p> <p>WESTERN MINING</p>	<p>RETAILERS.</p> <p>EDWARD BROTHERS.</p> <p>BLACK STONES, LIGHT AND BROWN</p> <p>WOMEN'S CLOTHING.</p>	<p>MANUFACTURERS</p> <p>HYDRAULIC ASSAY</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>J. BOWLING, P.</p> <p>(Formerly with G. W. ...)</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p>
---	--	---	---	--

Townsend occupied the pulpit, when he went back to the saloon business, after eighteen years of industrious drinking on the part of the public he brought his wealth to the Pacific Coast. This was in 1849. For several years Mr. Townsend ran simultaneously eight saloons, five newspapers and an immense cattle ranch in various parts of the Golden State. In 1859 the enterprising gentleman was suddenly afflicted with a disease which for many months compelled him to lie on his back in one position. This misfortune was, with the cruel levity of those rough days, turned to account by his acquaintances, who dubbed him "Lying Jim" Townsend, and ever since the sobriquet has stuck to him. For the last decade he has devoted himself to journalism and is, of course, once more poor. Some of his friends who are of a mathematical turn have ascertained from data furnished them by Mr. Townsend in various conversations the remarkable fact that he is 384 years old. Notwithstanding his great age, however, the gentleman still writes with the vigor of youth, and his shrewd humor is making for the **Gazette** more than a local reputation.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to his writing ability Townsend's inventive genius was displayed in several *arrastras* (ore-crushers) which he constructed. Praising one of them the *Index* stated:

The *arrastra* is constructed on the most scientific methods, illustrating Jim's aptitude for mechanics, which is only excelled by his capacity for whiskey, which is simply unlimited.<sup>11</sup>

His flying machine also brought him fame, many years before the Wright brothers flew theirs at Kittyhawk:

Jim Townsend . . . left the *Index* all set up and printed full of local news three weeks ahead, and is here to look after his flying machine, one of the greatest inventions of the age, surpassing anything in line of perpetual motion ever talked of. In order to bring it to a standstill after getting it once started one has to begin stopping it six hours before starting it.<sup>12</sup>

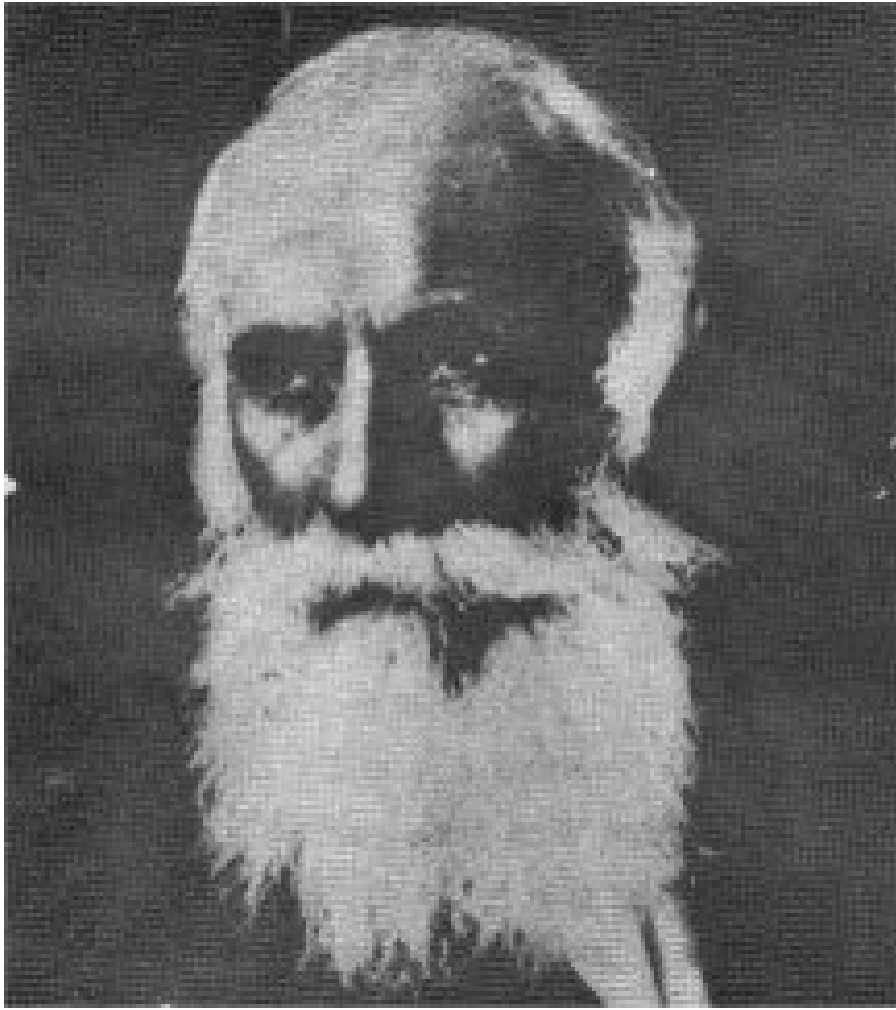


LUNDY, HOME OF THE HOMER MINING INDEX, DATE AND CELEBRATION UNKNOWN

---



6. THE MEN



THOMAS BENNETT, JR.



WM. C. N. SWIFT



RHODOLPHUS SWIFT

THE NAMES of certain men are repeated again and again in the records of the operation on Tioga Hill; others appear briefly to be seen no more.

It is possible that a man named Oliver H. Brooks may have supplied the initial spark for the formation of a company which lighted the western sky brilliantly for more than two years before it burned itself out.

Brooks appears first on the scene in December 1880 as superintendent of construction of the Bodie and Mill Creek telegraph line, extending a wire to Lundy.<sup>13</sup> In March of 1881 he was assistant superintendent of the Great Sierra Mining Company, leaving with a force of 15 miners to work on the Mount Dana Mine. <sup>14</sup> Two weeks later, apparently satisfied with the mine,

O. H. Brooks . . . left . . . for Indianapolis, Chicago and New York to consult with some of the owners of the mine in regard to the erection of the much needed reduction works. To the eye of an experienced mining man like Mr. Brooks it required but a glance to see that with ample mill facilities and the vast amount of good ore in sight in the Great Sierra there are "millions in it." <sup>15</sup>

Significant in the paragraph above is the word "Chicago" for in that city resided Dr. Almon Brooks, brother of Oliver. It was inevitable that the brothers would discuss the potential wealth of Tioga, perhaps including in their discussion their brother-in-law, Judge Joseph J. Parker of Canton, Ohio. Almon Brooks in turn contacted William H. Forbes of Boston, one of the organizers of the American Bell Telephone Company, giving him a description of "the immense wealth contained in the Great Sierra Mines in Tioga Mining District" and offering an opportunity to purchase an interest in the property for himself and to include some of his eastern friends. <sup>1</sup> Colonel Forbes had a summer home and friends in New Bedford. These friends doubtlessly included Thomas Bennett, Jr., one of the founders and First Agent of the Wamsutta Mills, William Cole Nye Swift, of the firm of Swift and Perry, whaling ship owners and outfitters, and his brother, Rhodolphus Nye Swift, a whaling captain whom tragedy had driven from the sea\*.<sup>16</sup> Forbes and these men met in Boston the summer of 1881. That meeting set the stage for the drama to follow:

**June 8, 1881** — It is expected that J. C. Kemp and O. H. Brooks, who have met with very good success in procuring capital in the East for the development of some of the mines of Tioga District will return to Bodie about the 15th instant.<sup>17</sup>

So impressed was the group with the reports of mining engineers John I. Ginn (later editor of the *Homer Mining Index*,) Russell F. Lord<sup>18</sup> and others that action was initiated which resulted in the acquisition of the major claims of both the Shepherder and the Great Sierra lodes.

Leg-man on the scene at Tioga was Judge Parker, whose name appears frequently in the records of Mono County for late 1881. He busied himself locating and purchasing claims, adjusting titles, and consolidating ownership of the various claims on Tioga Hill into one company. This was accomplished successfully in November.<sup>1</sup>

[\*]*Rhodolphus' first son was born and died while he was at sea. He never sailed again.*

---

## 7. CONSOLIDATED SILVER

UNDER THE LAWS of the State of Illinois an organization was formed on November 10, 1881 known as the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company. Its capital stock was 800,000 shares—\$8 million—and was subscribed to by 19 men in amounts ranging from 10 shares (\$100) to the 795,560 shares (\$7,955,600) signed for by Judge Joseph Parker.<sup>19</sup> This may well have been a shrewd move on the part of the Judge. Purchased on a promissory basis, his shares would give him control of the company, yet he had little to lose should the venture fail.

President Thomas Bennett, Jr. reported that some 50,000 shares of the treasury stock were sold at \$1 per share. This furnished a portion of the money used to meet the expenses of the first year, but sales were not fast enough, and it became necessary to obtain money by loans to the company. <sup>1</sup>

A tone of discord runs through the entire operation of the Great Sierra Company; friction between “Eastern” and “Western” stockholders—never clearly defined geographically in the old reports—and between those who willingly advanced more money to continue operations and those who would not. In the end this caused the collapse of the company. But things looked smooth on the surface:

This looks like business on a large scale, and from what we know of the character and enterprise of several of the Eastern capitalists who are large stockholders and directors of the company, we are satisfied that they mean business . . .<sup>20</sup> Considering the enormous width of these lodes, the length of ground owned by the company and the quality of this ore, this consolidation constitutes perhaps the largest and most valuable mining property ever owned by a single corporation in the United States. <sup>21</sup>

STOCK SUBSCRIPTION, GREAT SIERRA CO.

To Henry D. Dement,

Secretary of State of the State of Illinois:

THE COMMISSIONERS duly authorized to open books of subscription to the Capital Stock of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company pursuant to license heretofore issued bearing date the twelfth day of December A. D. 1884, do hereby report that they opened books of subscription to the Capital Stock of said Company, and that the said stock was fully subscribed; that the following is a true copy of such subscription, viz: ~~the names of the subscribers for the number of shares~~

We, the undersigned, hereby severally subscribe for the number of shares set opposite our respective names, to the capital stock of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company, and we, each for ourselves, agree to pay to said company the sum of ten dollars, for and in consideration of each of such shares, in such instalments and at such time or times as shall be determined by the Board of Directors of said company.

Dated at Chicago, County of Cook and State of Illinois, this 10th day of November, 1884.

NAME	Shares	Amount
John S. Gregory, Cedar, Ill.	500	\$5000
Frederick C. Gregory, " "	100	\$1000
John W. Haines, " "	500	\$5000
W. C. A. Swift, San Francisco, Calif.	500	\$5000
W. A. Swift, New York, N. Y.	500	\$5000
Thos. Bennett Jr., San Francisco, Calif.	500	\$5000
F. Hathaway, " "	500	\$5000
Charles H. Freeman, Chicago, Ill.	10	\$100
Charles S. Gregory, " "	10	\$100
Warren B. Wilson, " "	10	\$100
J. J. Parker, Canton, Ohio	795.560	\$7,955,600
Andrew L. Graff, St. Paul, Minn.	50	\$500
Wm. H. Forbes, Boston, Mass.	50	\$500
Alison Brooks, Chicago, Ill.	100	\$1000
C. A. L. Graff, St. Paul, Minn.	100	\$1000
George W. Whitfield, Chicago, Ill.	10	\$100
H. Lee Brewster, Elgin, Ill.	100	\$1000
George W. Whitfield, Chicago, Ill.	10	\$100



## 8. TUNNEL

THERE WOULD BE several advantages in driving a tunnel into Tioga Hill to cut the Shepherder and Great Sierra lodes, the mining experts said. A tunnel would cut the veins at depth and in a zone of greater richness than on the surface. Water could be drained out through a tunnel, and ore and waste rock could be removed with the greatest efficiency. By striking the lodes at right angles the ore could be worked in both directions as well as upward. There was no difficulty in convincing the Board of Directors that this was the logical plan of operation:

**November 12, 1881** — The Great Sierra Mining Company of Tioga District had advertised for sealed proposals for running a double track tunnel or adit 500 feet into Tioga Hill, the tunnel to be nine feet wide, six feet high in the clear at the walls, and seven feet in the arch. The Tunnel will be started in the cove at the head of the south fork of Lee Vining Creek and driven for the Lake and Sonora locations now being prosecuted. . . . 22 The Shepherder lode will be cut by the adit in the Sonora location, near the Lake at a distance in of 1765 feet and at a vertical depth of 751 feet, and the Great Sierra lode will be cut in the Bevan, near the Hancock, at a distance of 2675 feet and vertical depth of 830 feet. . . . 17

**November 19, 1881** — U. S. Deputy Mineral Surveyor H. B. Carpenter returned from Tioga on Sunday, having completed survey for the double track tunnel from the cove at the head of the south branch of Lee Vining Creek to the Shepherder lode.<sup>23</sup>

**February 25, 1882** — T. Jeff McClelland, the new foreman, took over twelve miners and a blacksmith on Tuesday last and commenced work on the tunnel Wednesday morning. The hand work will be pushed by three 8-hour shifts. . . . An assay made recently at the chemical laboratory of Wm. D. Johnson, San Francisco, of ore taken from the 15-inch vein in the face of the west crosscut, 100-foot level of the Great Sierra shaft, gave a trace of gold and \$438.60 per ton in silver. . . . 24 Thus was started the Great Sierra Tunnel, destined to be driven 1784 feet in a test of men and metal before the collapse of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company.

---

## 9. MACHINERY

DRIVING A TUNNEL into rock so hard that it sometimes took several shifts of miners working by hand to drill a single set of blast holes soon showed that drilling machinery was essential. So J. C. Kemp van Ee, former operator of the Occidental Hotel in Bodie and now manager of the company was sent to San Francisco to buy it and arrange for its delivery to Lundy:

Finding that hand-work was too slow a process by which to drive their great tunnel, the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company of Tioga has purchased air compressors, two Burleigh and one National drill and all necessary machinery, and have made arrangements to have the same placed upon the ground and put in running order immediately. The machinery will be transported by teams to the foot of the cliffs in Bloody Canyon, from which point it will be snaked up over the snow to the summit by block and tackle, and from the

summit to the tunnel it will be transported on sleds. The undertaking is a heavy one, but in accordance with the policy of the company, no expense is to be spared in hastening the development of their valuable properties. 25

J. C. Kemp, manager of the company's property— and to whose business capacity and tireless energy the company is greatly indebted for the progress already made under the most trying and at times seemingly-unsurmountable difficulties—returned yesterday from San Francisco . . . The machinery has been purchased, cut into sections of suitable size for rapid transportation across the mountain, and is now on the road to this place. Verily the Great Sierra management has from the first displayed energy and dominion over difficulties that might be imitated with profit by some of the poke-easies of this district. 26



AIR COMPRESSOR, GREAT SIERRA TUNNEL





AIR BLOWER AT TUNNEL

The air compressor and Ingersoll drills for the Great Sierra tunnel are expected at Lundy next Wednesday. . . . In the meantime hand-work in the tunnel will be pushed with all possible dispatch. Jeff McClelland, for many years foreman of the Imperial and subsequently Superintendent of the Justice mine on the Comstock . . . is foreman; Josh Crane, who built, the first cage on the Comstock will be head blacksmith, and the air compressor and machine drills will be run under the personal supervision of John Cribbins, who has been engaged in that line of business for many years under Parke and Lacy, manufacturers of the machines. These men are all first-class artisans in their respective vocations and under their care the work cannot fail to progress smoothly, and economically. The tunnel is now in about 70 and the rock in the face breaks well, the face being in a kind of slate which gives traces of gold by assay. 27

**March 4, 1882** — The transportation of 16,000 pounds of machinery across one of the highest and most rugged branches of the Sierra Nevada mountains in mid-winter, where no roads exist, over vast fields and huge embankments of yielding snow and in the face of furious wind storms laden with drifting snow, and the mercury dancing attendance on zero, is a task calculated to appall the sturdiest mountaineer; yet J. C. Kemp, manager of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company it now engaged in such an undertaking, and with every prospect of success at an early day—so complete has been the arrangement of details and so intelligently directed is every movement The first ascent, from Mill Creek to the mouth of Lake Canyon, is 990 feet, almost perpendicular. From that point to the south end of Lake Oneida, a distance of about two miles, is a rise of 845 feet, most of it in two hills aggregating half a mile in distance. The machinery will probably be hoisted straight up to the summit of Mount Warren ridge from the south. west shore of Lake Oneida, an almost-vertical rise of 2,160 feet. From the summit the descent will be made to Saddlebags Lake, thence down to and along Lee Vining Creek to the gap or pass in the dividing point to tunnel, a distance of about one mile, is a rise of 800 feet, most of it in the first quarter of a mile.

The machinery consists of an engine, boiler, air compressor, Ingersoll drills, iron pipe, etc. for use in driving the Great Sierra tunnel. It is being transported on six heavy sleds admirably constructed of hardwood. Another, or rather a pair of bobsleds accompanies the expedition, the latter being laden with bedding, provisions, cooking utensils, etc. The heaviest load is 4,200 pounds. Ten or twelve men, two mules, 4,500 feet of one-inch manila rope, heavy double block and tackle and all the available trees along the route are employed in snaking the machinery up the mountain—the whole being under the immediate supervision of Mr. Kemp, who remains at the front and personally directs every movement It is expected that all the sleds will be got up into Lake Canyon today, and then the work will be pushed day and night, with two shifts of men. . . . 28





MACHINERY AT TUNNEL (1954)

History has not recorded the suffering of the men, but it must have been intense. At least one and perhaps two of the men were killed in the avalanches of March 15, 1882 which buried men and machinery in Lake Canyon. It took Kemp and his men more than two months—from March 4 until May 6— to move the eight tons a distance of about nine miles. It is said that Kemp's remark at the end of the back-breaking task was, "It's no wonder that men grow old!"

As soon as it could be bolted down at the mouth of the tunnel, the machinery began to hum and the drills to rattle against the hard rock.\*

*\*After suffering from vandalism and the rigors of more than 70 Sierran winters the old machinery was salvaged. It may be seen today at the Wawona Pioneer Village in Yosemite National Park.*

---



SADDLEBAGS LAKE, FROZEN, MOUNT DANA IN DISTANCE



LUNDY IN WINTER, MOUNT SCOWDEN RISES IN THE BACKGROUND

## 10. AVALANCHE

AVALANCHE is a word which chills the hearts of those who know its meaning. At exactly the same hour, 11 p.m. on the night of March 15; 1882, six of these near-silent messengers of death raced down far-separated Sierran slopes, taking lives, causing innumerable injuries, and burying the machinery being pulled up Lake Canyon en route to the Great Sierra Tunnel.

Some old timers believed that an earthquake jolt started the avalanches on their race of destruction. John Ginn of the *Index* was of the opinion that the heavy storm which preceded the avalanches was “the most extraordinary and phenomenal” witnessed in the Sierra Nevada since their settlement by white man. His coverage from Lundy of the tragic event is an example of excellent reporting:

Neither language nor the painter’s art can convey to the mind of the most imaginative anything like a true conception of the appalling scenes the inhabitants of these vast mountains witnessed during the days and nights of terror through which they passed last week. On March 9 and 10 sixteen inches of snow fell; the 11th was a clear day; from the morning of the 17th snow fell incessantly and heavily and again on the morning of the 18th snow began to fall and continued until noon of the 19th . . . Heavy winds prevailed most of the time. By Wednesday noon, 15th instant, 6 feet of snow had fallen in Mill Creek Canyon, and seven to eight feet in the higher mountains . . .

About 11 p.m. a cry of distress was heard penetrating the storm from the opposite side of the canyon. . . . Men rushed to the sidewalk, listened, and replied. . . . Directly the voice was recognized as that of one of the Bagby boys who occupied a strong log cabin near the center of the grove in the flat.

A large number of men with lanterns and shovels started at once, but were half an hour making their way to the spot—a distance of only 300 yards— sinking in the soft snow up to their shoulders, and being compelled to breast their way through the mass by main strength. The strongest man could not break the trail for more than 20 feet before becoming completely exhausted, the fury of the storm being as difficult to contend with as the depth of the snow. Another but smaller party of men started from the postoffice, up town, and attempted to break their way straight across to the scene of distress, but after a most exhausting struggle of nearly an hour, was compelled to give it up and retrace their steps. The avalanche which wrecked the Bagby cabin had broken loose below the upper line of the Lake Canyon grade, ran down about 700 feet, turned sharply to the right and leaped into the air. Crashing through timber expended its force soon after demolishing the cabin and burying its occupants. John and Ab Bagby were occupying together an upper berth in the end of the cabin opposite the approach of the avalanche, and E. F. Isbell was sleeping in a berth beneath them. Just as the crash came, Ab Bagby woke and raised suddenly in bed, when he was dashed up against the heavy log roof, while his brother was crushed down toward the floor and caught under a cupboard which had been nailed against the wall at the opposite end of the room. Neither of the brothers were seriously injured and soon got together up against the roof.\*

*\*Ab’s son Everett Bagby of Mariposa, California tells us that his father was reading “East Lynne” at the moment the avalanche struck. Addicted to strong language, Ab was particularly profane as the brothers were attempting to dig to freedom. Chided by John, Ab replied: “Why the Lord himself would cuss if he was in a fix like this!”*

But nothing could be heard of Isbell. The brothers lighted a match, got a piece of board and began digging. They soon succeeded in digging a small hole up to the surface, allowing the snow from above to fall down through a small aperture between two of the heavy

logs of the roof. But their progress was checked, as with their united strength they could not shake one of the logs. From this prison they began calling up through the hole. The relief party soon extricated the Bagbys, but dug nearly an hour and a half before Isbell was found. The cabin had been shoved 16 feet from the original site, and when found, Isbell was lying in his bed, not having moved an inch, while the snow was packed about and for several feet above him was almost as hard as ice—and a little kitten was crouched beside his face, purring. Neither was injured. Bagby's dog, sleeping in the cabin at the time of the wreck, also escaped. Five days afterward another cat was dug out alive . . .

About 11 o'clock on the night of the 15th (the hour at which most avalanches of Mill Creek and Lake Canyon and Tioga occurred) an immense body of snow dropped from the cliff above, crushing another cabin and burying the four occupants—William Miller, James McCallum, Joseph Plant, and Judge Harry P. Medlicott. The first two named were buried near the same spot by the avalanche of one year ago. They were also the first to dig their way out this year, which they succeeded in doing about 2 o'clock next morning. They at once set about digging out their companions and rescued them at 6 a.m. Plant had rested easily during his confinement; but Medlicott was painfully injured about the chest and one thigh and suffered great agony—so much that at one time despairing of release, he begged his fellow prisoner to cut his throat. After his release, however, he made his way to town. . . .

At about the same hour as the other avalanches occurred a thunderbolt of snow struck the Trumble House, near the foot of the May Lundy tramway in



NEAR FOOT OF MAY LUNDY TRAMWAY

Lake Canyon, carrying away the building and scattering the wreck for a distance of 200 feet across the canyon. There were sleeping in the house at the time, Robert J. Trumble, Alex McKeon, D. B. Grant, Henry Schumaker, Christian Hablitzel and Steve Trumble. The first four named were either killed outright or were subsequently asphyxiated under the snow.

Steve Trumble got out, barefooted and with nothing but his underclothing on, and through the deep snow and bitter cold storm attempted to make Pat Regan's cabin, some 300 feet distant. After wallowing in the snow for a while, sometimes sinking over his head, and finding that his feet were freezing, he procured two of the blankets in which he had been sleeping, and by spreading first one and then the other on the snow in front and crawling on his hands and knees, he was finally enabled to approach near enough to the cabin to alarm Regan's dog. Regan took him in, rubbed his feet with snow until he brought the frost to the surface, and then visited the scene of the disaster with a lantern. Nothing could be seen save the great ridge of compact snow and here and there a fragment of the building, and nothing could be heard save the thunder of the storm.

Next morning, amidst the still-raging storm, Pat Regan mounted his snow shoes and came to town for assistance. A party of 11 was organized and started at once for the scene of the disaster . . . six being on snow shoes and the other five on foot, but all provided with shovels

The attempt to ascend the steep and lofty mountain facing the storm, in such a storm as was then raging, and with millions of tons of loose snow hanging from every cliff and slope, ready to start at the slightest touch and sweep the whole party into eternity, was as heroic an act as history records; and every eye in the whole town was riveted upon the silent procession as it filed up the steep acclivity, and every heart beat quicker as the men were seen to approach and pass the more dangerous places. . . . Those who had snow shoes kept on, but the others were compelled to return; so great was the depth of snow in the upper canyon that they could not make 300 feet per hour.

Immediately on the return of the shoeless party, J. C. Kemp, manager for the Great Sierra Company of Tioga (three of his men engaged in snaking the machinery up the Sierra being among the buried) set about having snow shoes made for all who would volunteer to go.

In the meantime the first party reached the scene and recovered three of the dead. As they were about to leave for the night a moan was heard beneath the snow and after digging down eight feet they came upon Hablitzel, wrapped in his blankets and bedding, still alive, but nearly exhausted. He still believes that he could not have lived one minute longer but for his release. . . .

Amidst tragedy and death there was still room for humor:

Andy Nelson was sleeping in the toll house at the mouth of Lake Canyon when the procession of avalanches moved. A huge snowslide started from the top of Mount Gilcrest, rushing across the canyon struck Mount Scowden, turned down Lake Canyon and ran to within 200 feet of Mill Creek, a total distance of one mile and a half. In its course it swept away a strong stable at the toll house, a bale of hay, some barley, and an old gray horse that had been employed on the capstan drawing up the machinery for the Great Sierra tunnel at Tioga. Next morning Nelson went out to feed the horse, but could not find either horse or feed. Procuring a long pole he commenced prospecting, and kept it up until a relief party going up Lake Canyon Creek late that afternoon heard the old horse breathing under the snow. Digging in, they found him in an upright position, like a soldier, with the feed by his side and two logs from the stable resting across his nose. He was uninjured, barring a crick in his neck which keeps his head turned toward one shoulder - just fitting him for circular work, such as that required in turning a capstan. A stall was excavated in the snow, feed was put before him, and the old horse is there yet. . . .

Death stalked the men at Tioga, some 10 miles from Lundy:

At the usual hour, 11 o'clock on the night of the 15th, 21 men were buried in the Great Sierra tunnel lodging house at Bennett City, by a huge avalanche from Tioga Hill. Several smaller snow slides had coursed down the hill during the day, covering the portal of the tunnel with their wings, and hence work had been suspended and all the men were in the lodging house a structure of huge logs two to three feet in diameter, with a partition wall of similar material, the whole being half buried on the side next to the mountain. The house stood on elevated ground 400 or 500 feet from the base of the mountain, with the deep ravine of Slate Creek between the base and the building; and yet the avalanche swept across the creek, up the ridge, demolished the building and plunged through the heavy timber and along the side of the ridge for a distance of 1,000 feet or more.

R. W. Woolard (Secretary) and Dr. F. Kemp (San Francisco dentist, brother of J. C. Kemp) were occupying a small frame office at the end of the main building, and were just preparing to retire when the crash came. The frame building was crushed to the earth, Woolard was pinned across the hot stove and nails projecting through the roof nailed his head to the floor. Dr. Kemp was fastened against and behind the stove—and their lighted lamp was broken and their bed set on fire! A rafter from above and a



BROKEN STOVE, TIOGA HILL AND TUNNEL IN DISTANCE

plank shelf below closed tightly against Woolard's neck, while his body rested across Dr. Kemp's hip. Dr. Kemp could have worked his way out, but the moment he removed his support from Woolard's body the latter would be left hanging by the neck.

The log house had been struck between "wind and water" as it were, the upper portion carried away, and the men left lying in their bunks with eight or ten feet of soft snow above them. Jack Hammond was the first to dig his way out, and realizing from the situation that the

other men in the log building were not in danger, he went to the rescue of Woolard and Kemp. With bare feet and hands he dug down through the snow to the base of the building, and crawled in between the roof and floor on his belly. A strong table had been overturned and was supporting the roof, and the legs of this table obstructed Hammond's passage. Tearing off one of the legs he continued crawling until he reached the men. He had carried a hatchet in with him, and with this he cut the rafter away and released Woolard's neck, broke the stove and released his legs, and dragged both men out. The smoldering fire was not extinguished until the next day. . . . Woolard sustained two long cuts on his head, made by the nails, and a severe burn on the front portion of the left thigh. On the 24th he was placed upon a sled and drawn across the mountains to Lundy. . . . 29



RUINS OF BOARDINGHOUSE BARN AT RIGHT

---

## 11. BENNETTVILLE



MOUNT DANA LOOKS DOWN ON BENNETTVILLE, FROM A PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN IN 1898.

BENNETTVILLE, first called Bennett City, sprang into being a few hundred yards from the mouth of the tunnel. In a region noted for the scenic beauty of its summers and the bitterness of its winters, it was named for the company's president, Thomas Bennett, Jr. It soon became headquarters for the Tioga Mining District.

The embryo town . . . is situated in a beautiful valley or cove at the base of Tioga Hill, 9,300 feet above sea level, and is sheltered to the south and west by the towering and somber cliffs of Tioga Hill . . . while Slate Creek, a large and beautiful mountain stream, goes rushing and laughing through the center of the vale. . . . Bennett City, being centrally and beautifully situated, will be the principal town of the district, though when the mines are developed they will doubtless support one or two other towns of considerable size . . . There is ample room on the gently rolling ground for a city of 50,000 inhabitants, with an abundance of wood and water of the best quality on the ground. 30

John Martin snaked machinery for a sawmill up from Lundy to provide timbers for the mine and for the buildings of the young city. A boardinghouse, several utility buildings, a company office, assay office and stable were constructed, and civilization moved in:

Bennettville . . . will hereafter be blessed with the presence of a number of ladies, as Mrs. W. C. Priest and Mrs. Emerie Reno will shortly take up their residence there, and it is rumored that others may also become residents . . . before the summer is over. 31

The young town had its wild moments and a society editor of today might turn up her nose at the social notes reported in the *Index*:

They had a "high old time" up at Bennettville last Saturday night. During the evening the book keeper of the Great Sierra Co. exhibited unmistakable signs of insanity, but it was not suspected that he would attempt to harm anyone. About midnight, however, he gathered together eight improved Winchester rifles, a Sharp's magazine rifle and one or two large 6-shooters and turned loose on the army of would-be-assassins he imagined were after him. In a few seconds the west wing of the Company's office building looked like an old-fashioned long-tom screen and the east end of the boarding and lodging house ten steps distant, was riddled with No. 45 slugs, some of which passed entirely through the building while others lodged in the mattresses and pillows under sleeping miners. Of course, great consternation ensued. The miners turned out and the maniac was secured—nobody hurt. In the office or sitting room of the lodging

house is a large stove, the pipe from which passes into a huge drum in the lodging room above. When the miners rushed out to capture the maniac, a big 220-pound calf (without horns) from Mount Gibbs, who happened to be stopping there that night, leaped into the stove-drum, pulling the lid down over the only open end thereof. He could not reopen it from inside. As the night was intensely cold, and most of the men were out in their night clothes only, the Chinese cook got up and built a rousing fire in the sitting room stove—and there was another tremendous commotion, upstairs. 32

Of the dozen or more buildings which once graced Bennettville only two remain today—the old stable and what probably was the assay office. In the shadow of Mount Dana they have weathered quietly to a golden brown. Burned wood outlines the foundations of the company office and a large warehouse. The fate of the other buildings is not known.



LIGHTS AND SHADOWS IN BARN LOFT, BENNETTVILLE

COMPANY OFFICE RUINS, BENNETTVILLE

---

## 12. AH WEE DIED THREE TIMES



*Last known photograph of  
Lee "Ah Wee" Chung, May 1884.  
(not in original book)*

ONE AUTUMN AFTERNOON during Bennettville's heyday one of its illustrious citizen a Chinese named Ah Wee, departed unceremoniously:

Last week Jim Toy, the Celestial restaurateur of Lundy, received intelligence that his countryman and friend, Ah Wee, the pioneer laundryman of Bennettville, was sick unto death. Jim hastened to the bedside of his dying friend, reaching his destination but a few



minutes before Ah Wee expired. After the body became cold and rigid, Jim went to the boarding house for his supper, after which several parties accompanied him back to the laundryman's shanty—and it was well that they did, for Ah Wee was up and walking about, and it required the united strength of the whole party to get him back to bed and hold him there. Jim remained by his bedside, administering such remedies as he thought the case required, but all to no purpose, for just before daylight next morning Ah Wee peacefully breathed his last. After breakfast Jim had a strong box constructed in which to transport the body, by pack mule, to Lundy for interment—occasionally throughout the forenoon looking in upon the corpse to see if he could discover any signs of returning animation. So things stood until noon when Louis Amoit's pack train arrived. The body was then placed in the box and the burden strapped on the back of a pack mule. On reaching the lofty and nearly level ridge known as Mount Warren Divide, Louis hurried up his mules. The one with the corpse began to trot, and the "corpse" began to groan. Louis thought at first that it was the mule, and still his hat showed a disposition to crawl up on the top of his head. He stopped the mule. The groans became more audible. Then Louis' eyeballs crawled out on his cheeks, took a look at his ears, and tried to climb under his hat. Ah Wee was alive again! He was brought to town, placed in comfortable quarters and appeared to be convalescing until 11 o'clock Monday forenoon, when a 'Melican (American) physician and an undertaker (among many others) looked in upon him, when Ah Wee turned his face to the wall and died again—this time for keeps. He was buried on Tuesday with imposing ceremonies of the Chinese kind. Jim Toy said that he died of a cold. We inquired if it was not a case of pneumonia. (Evidently thinking we said "no money") "No, no," said Toy, "him got no money—him allee time gamble—tlee week ago him losee two hunded dolla—him got no money!" 33

---



A GALLOWS FRAME OVERLOOKS TUOLUMNE MEADOWS

### 13. FORGOTTEN

WHILE BENNETTVILLE was growing up, miners swarmed over the Central Sierra. More than 350 mining locations were made in the Tioga District alone. 34 A high percentage of these were along the white ore belt which runs through Tioga Hill and along the western slopes of Mounts Dana and Gibbs. Today all are forgotten. An occasional rock pile or weathered stick marks on old claim but their names—White Horse, Chief of Tioga, Bunker Hill, Little Johnny, are found only in musty mining records. 35

On the western side of Mount Gibbs, overlooking Tuolumne Meadows is an old mine whose gallows frame rises above a deep shaft. Its capstan and brake were skillfully made of wood except for braces of metal. The old miner carefully cached his tools beneath the timbers before he left, and there they remained through dozens of winters until they were found and taken to the Yosemite Museum.

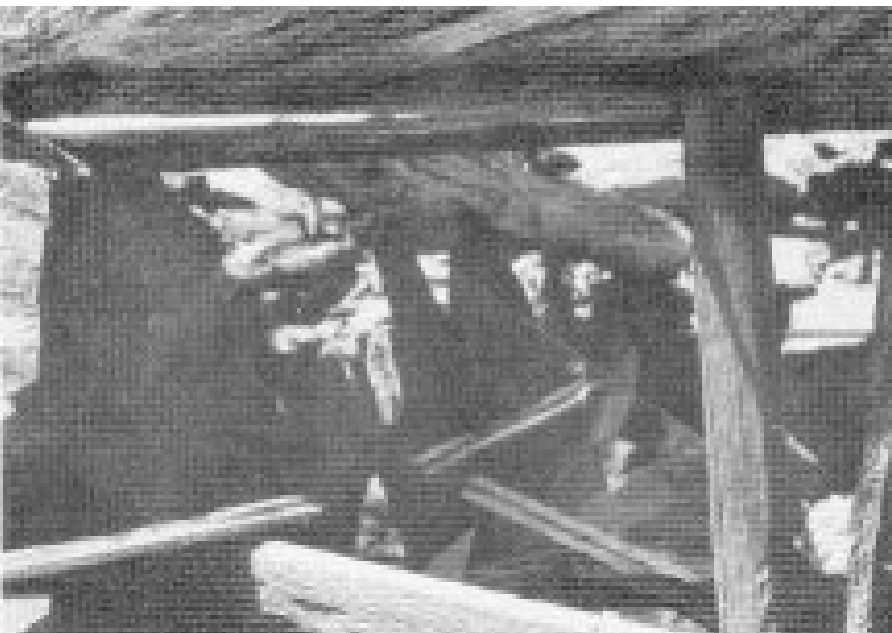
A little settlement lies a mile or so to the south of this mine. If it had a name it is long forgotten. In a window of one of its flat-roofed, avalanche-resistant stone cabins a piece of old glass remains. A gently-graded sled road leads south, directly to Mono Pass, where stand the five whitebark pine cabins of the Golden Crown and Ella Bloss mines. These were the property of the Great Sierra Company, and assessment work was done as late as 1890.

At the headwaters of the Dana Fork, about a mile southeast of Mono Pass, lies a small lake, jewel-like in an alpine setting. The topographic map calls it Parker Pass Lake.

Here Orlando Fuller, the locator of the Golden Crown and Bloss mines at the head of Bloody Canyon and the pioneer prospector and miner of this region has a cabin hanging, so to speak, over a lake still frozen over [Aug. 15] so that a horse can walk over the ice with safety . . . 36

Fuller has been gone for a long time now, and the snows and winds have reduced his cabin to its elements. It may still be found, though, and today's explorer of this beautiful region can pause for a moment to meditate beside Fuller's battered coffeepot and enjoy the view which greeted the old miner nearly fourscore years ago.

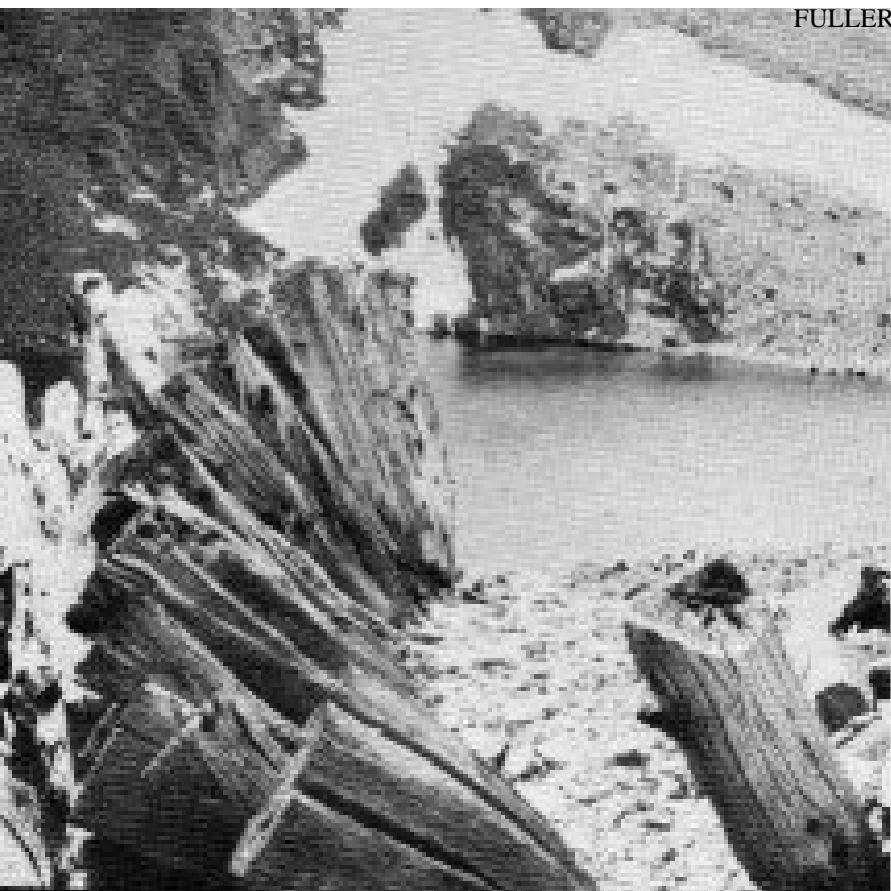
In the saddle between Dana and Gibbs is a pile of mill-sawed lumber. Weathered to a bleached gray it is still in the neat, old-fashioned triangular stack in which it was placed so many years ago. The wood is ponderosa pine, 37 but how it got there is another of the mysteries of this fascinating country, where man carried on frenzied activities for a short tme, then left for new fields. The traces of his life here remain only in the form of unanswered riddles.



OLD AVALANCHE-PROOF CABIN ON MOUNT GIBBS

A BIT OF WINDOW GLASS REFLECTS THE PAST

FULLER'S CABIN, PARKER PASS LAKE



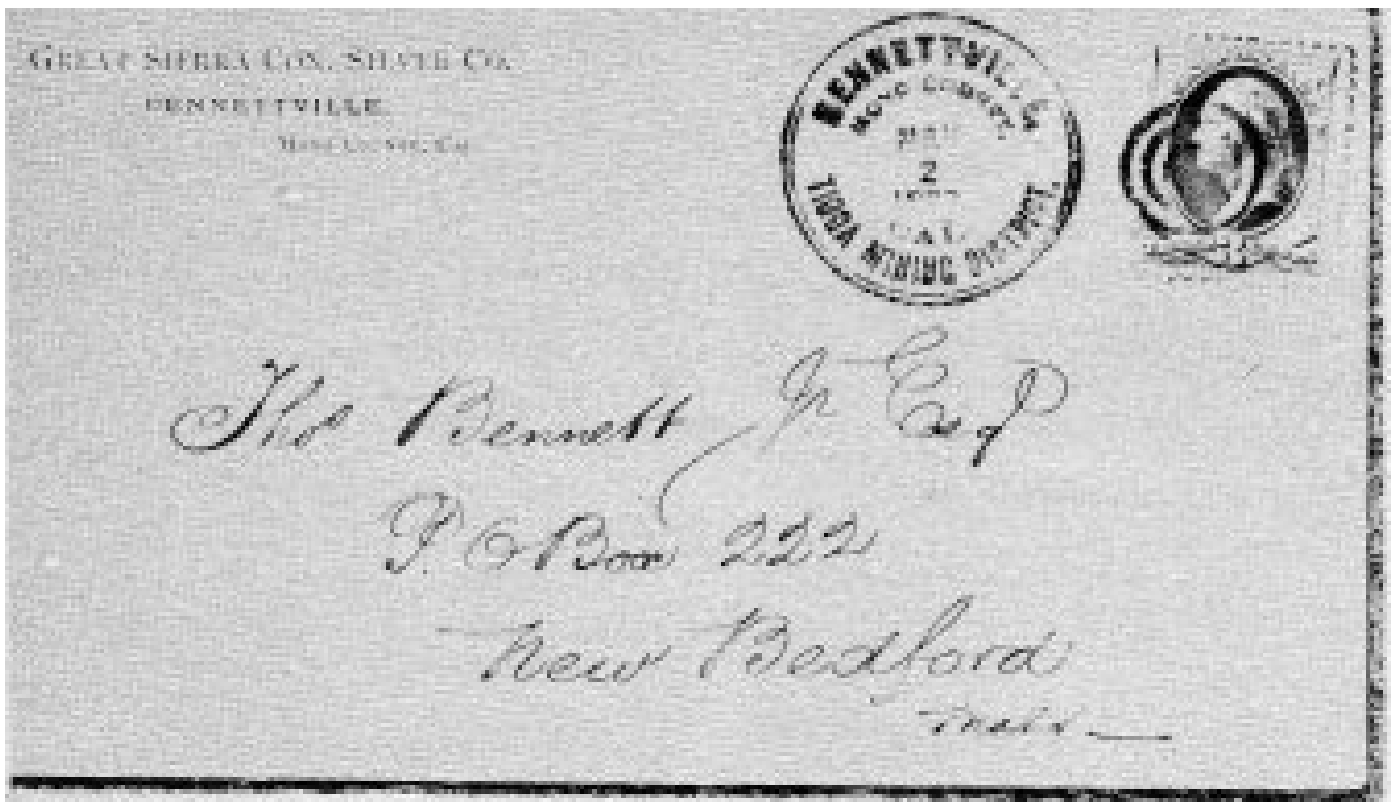
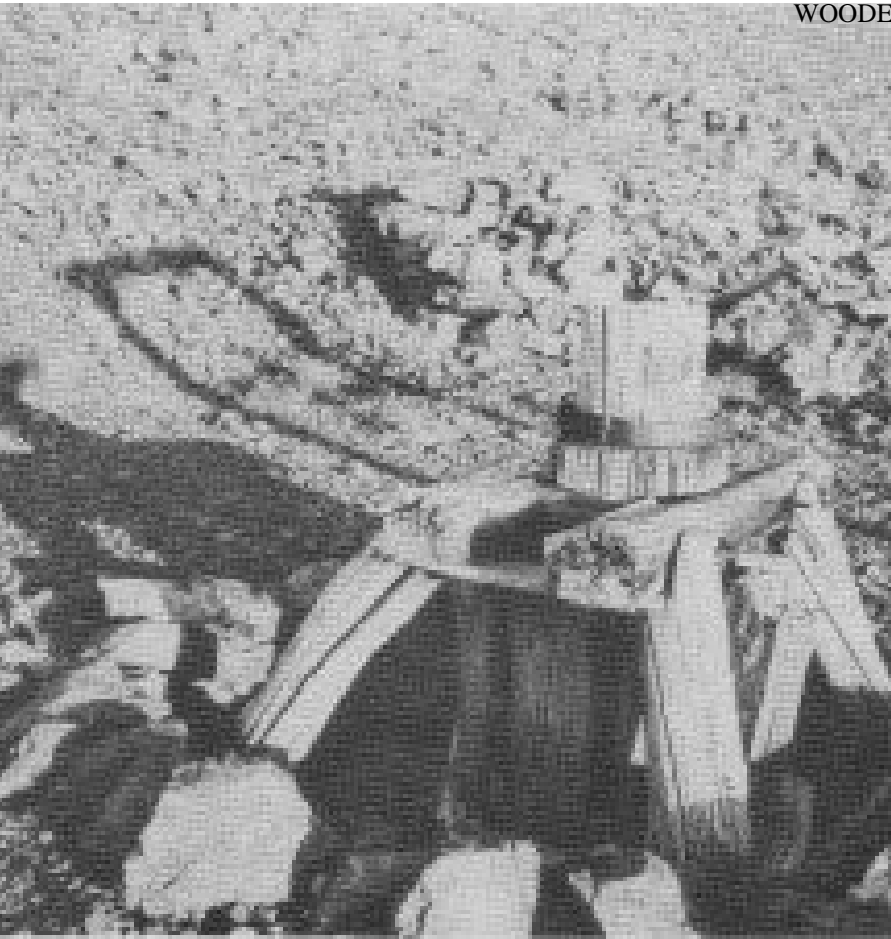


GOLDEN CROWN CABINS, MONO PASS

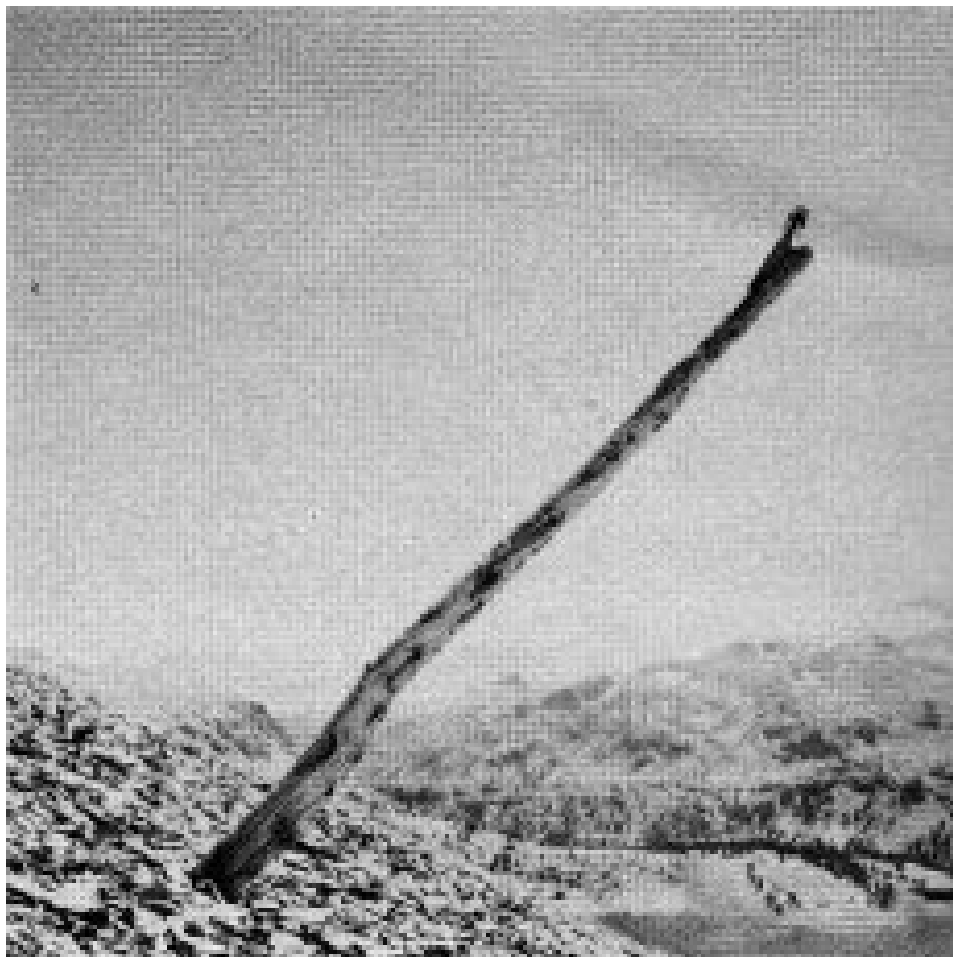


OLD LUMBER BETWEEN DANA AND GIBBS

WOODEN CAPSTAN, MOUNT GIBBS



14. STAMPS AND WIRE



OLD POLE ABOVE SADDLEBAGS LAKE



PAIR OF POLES ARE WEATHERING SIDE BY SIDE



#### ABOVE THE LAKE CANYON CLIFFS

AMONG THE RAREST of western postmarks is "Bennettville, Tioga Mining District, Mono County, Cal." With C. W. Curtis as first postmaster the Bennettville post office was established on March 13, 1882. Successive postmasters were Robert W. Woolard and William P. Onkst. Mail was carried on foot or on Norwegian snowshoes, generally via the Lake Canyon route from Lundy. The post office was discontinued on November 19, 1884. 38

More prompt and efficient communications were assured with the completion of "the world's highest telephone line" up the steep east face of the Sierra:

The Lundy and Tioga telephone line, recently constructed and owned by the Great Sierra Con. S. Co. of Tioga, is the highest telephone line in the world. The line is about nine miles in length, ascends 4,245 feet from Lundy, crosses Mount Warren Divide at an elevation of 12,250 feet above sea level, descends 3,750 feet to Lee Vining Creek, again ascends 800 feet to Bennett City, which is 9,300 feet above sea level. It works like a charm, every word over the line being clear and distinct, even when the most furious storms are beating against the wire along the lofty divide over which it runs. 39

The old line is down, its poles and insulators broken, but it may be traced for hundreds of yards where it crossed Mount Warren Divide (Tioga Crest) above Saddlebag Lake and down the perpendicular cliffs above Lake Canyon. At the summit of the divide three pairs of poles are weathering side by side, the position in which they were dropped from the panting pack animals which carried them there more than 70 years ago.



## 15. THE GOING WAS ROUGH

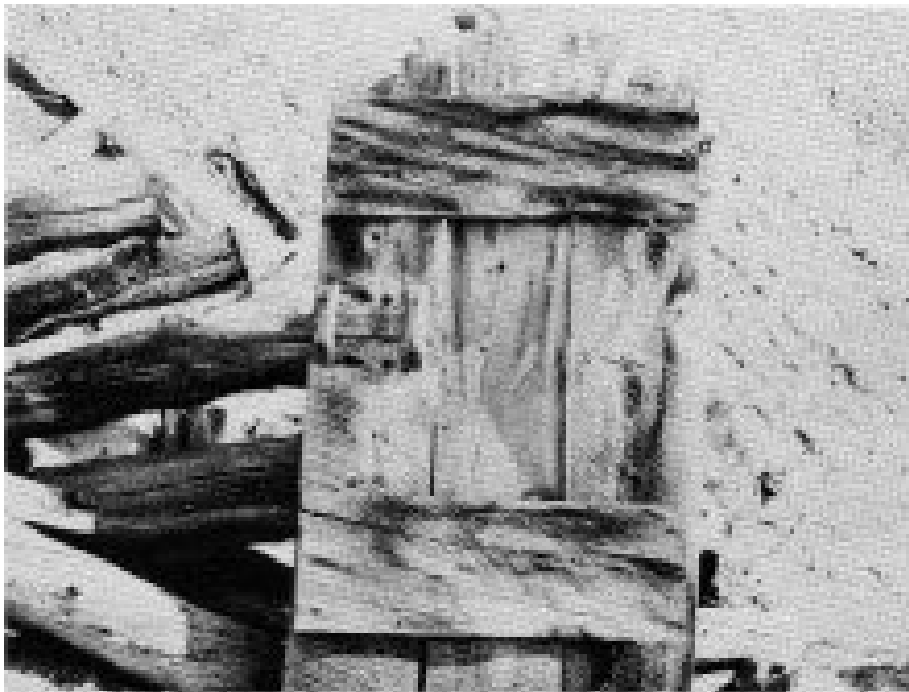
UNTIL THE CONSTRUCTION of the Great Sierra Wagon Road Bennettville and its environs were accessible only by trail. To the east Lundy was about 10 miles by Lake Canyon, 16 via Bloody Canyon. Yosemite Valley was 28 miles to the west, by a route much less precipitous than the eastern ones. In spite of difficulties and hardships hundreds of miners traveled these trails on foot, and many tons of supplies were packed in on the backs of men and animals. Some of their experiences were pathetic, others amusing:

Sometimes the going was easy:

T. Jeff McClelland, foreman of the Great Sierra Mine and Charley Benson . . . walked from Bennettville to Lundy on Saturday last, in two hours and three minutes—the fastest time on record. 40

Other times it was rough:

Yesterday Ben Dettmar and Tom Moore started for the Mount Dana [Mine, Tioga Hill] by way of Bloody Canyon. The route has not been tried this season that we know of. No matter how easy the new route may be we think Ben's belly will prove too big a pack for him. He ought to sling it in a leather apron. 41 . . . Friends were considerably excited about the safety of the two men . . . J. T. Slack received a telegram from James Sumner, in Bodie: "Do all in your power for Moore and Dettmar. Act promptly." Slack had organized a company to go in search of the missing men . . . when R. A. Sawyer and Jack Barrett arrived and reported that Dettmar and Moore had reached Tioga [16 miles from their starting point] safely, after wrestling five days with snow and starvation. Moore and Dettmar left King's Station on Sunday morning, [January 27, 1881] and the same night their fire was seen on the summit. Next day they reached Fuller's deserted cabin, where they remained until a break in the storm occurred, when they started again on their journey. They found in



FULLER'S CABIN DOOR

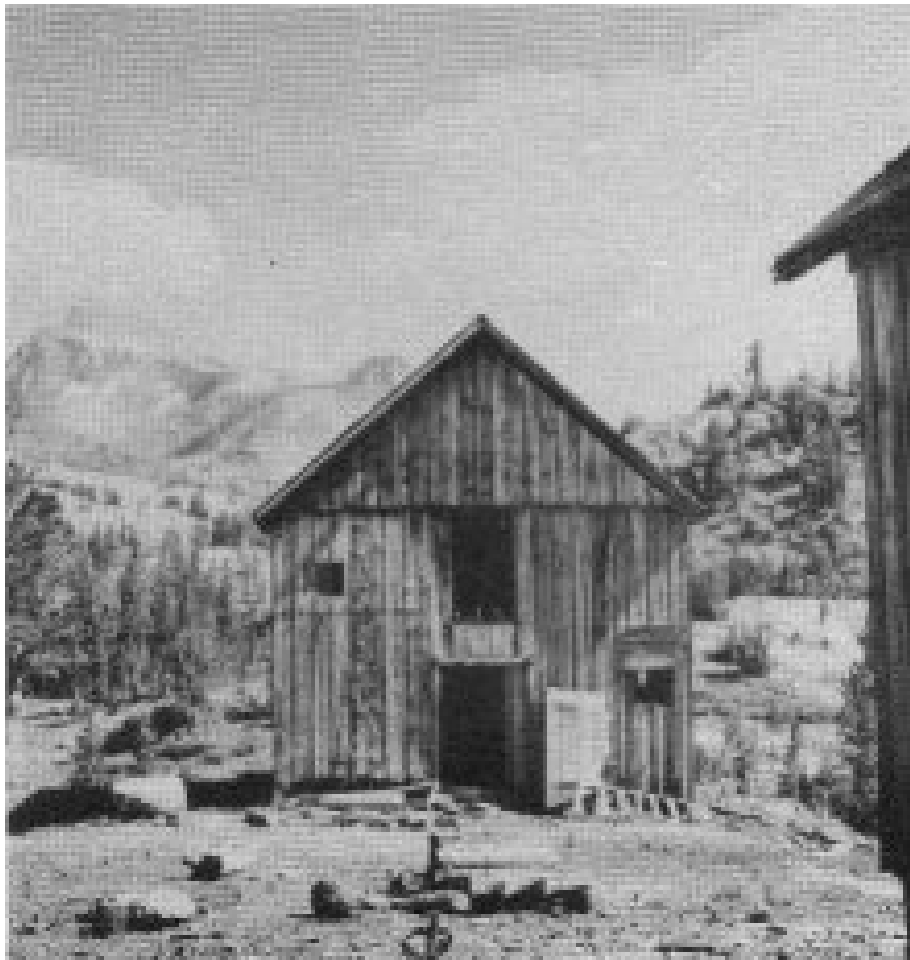
the cabin a small quantity of flour and borax—which Ben mistook for salt—and with this they made some royal flapjacks, which welded their intestines together like the fibres of a twist-barrel shotgun. They arrived in Tioga on Thursday evening, and though they fought a fearful storm all the way, neither was frostbitten. . . . Our people were very glad to learn that the travellers had safely arrived at their destination, and many a glass of whiskey was sacrificed in celebration of their good fortune. It is very risky business rambling around these canyons in winter. 42

Snowstorms were always a hazard:

**December 10, 1881** — U. S. Mineral Surveyor H. B. Carpenter and Judge Harry P. Medlicott went over to Tioga on Friday of last week, to do some surveying for the Great Sierra Company. Saturday night the great snow storm set in and raged with varying fury of wind until Monday morning, the heaviest wind and tall of snow being during the afternoon of Sunday. About 10 a.m. of that day the two gentlemen named left the Great Sierra tunnel at the base of Tioga Hill, to ascend Mount Warren and follow its lofty backbone to the head of Lake Canyon, intending to descend that canyon and reach home the same evening. The deep glacial valley of Lee Vining Creek was crossed and the ascent of Mount Warren made in safety, but with much fatigue, the snow being deep, damp and soft, and constantly coming down in blinding clouds, while neither of the daring footmen were provided with snowshoes. From the point where the summer trail from Tioga reaches the summit, up to the "jumping off place" at the head of Lake Canyon, a distance of three miles or more, Mount Warren is a narrow, sharp, barren rocky ridge, nearly or quite 12,000 feet high, running parallel to the main summit of the Sierra, from which it is separated by a deep, glacial valley six or seven miles in width. As the lofty summit of the Sierra at this point is never free from snow, the winds swoop down from it, sweep across the valley and strike the summit of Mount Warren with tremendous force almost every day of the year; but when the Storm King of Winter is abroad in the Sierras and the snow is whirling through the air with a velocity of more than 100 miles per hour and a density so great that one cannot see his own feet, the scene is appalling, and more so as the eastern side of this sharp ridge, over which you may be hurled bodily at any moment, is a precipice of more than a thousand feet.

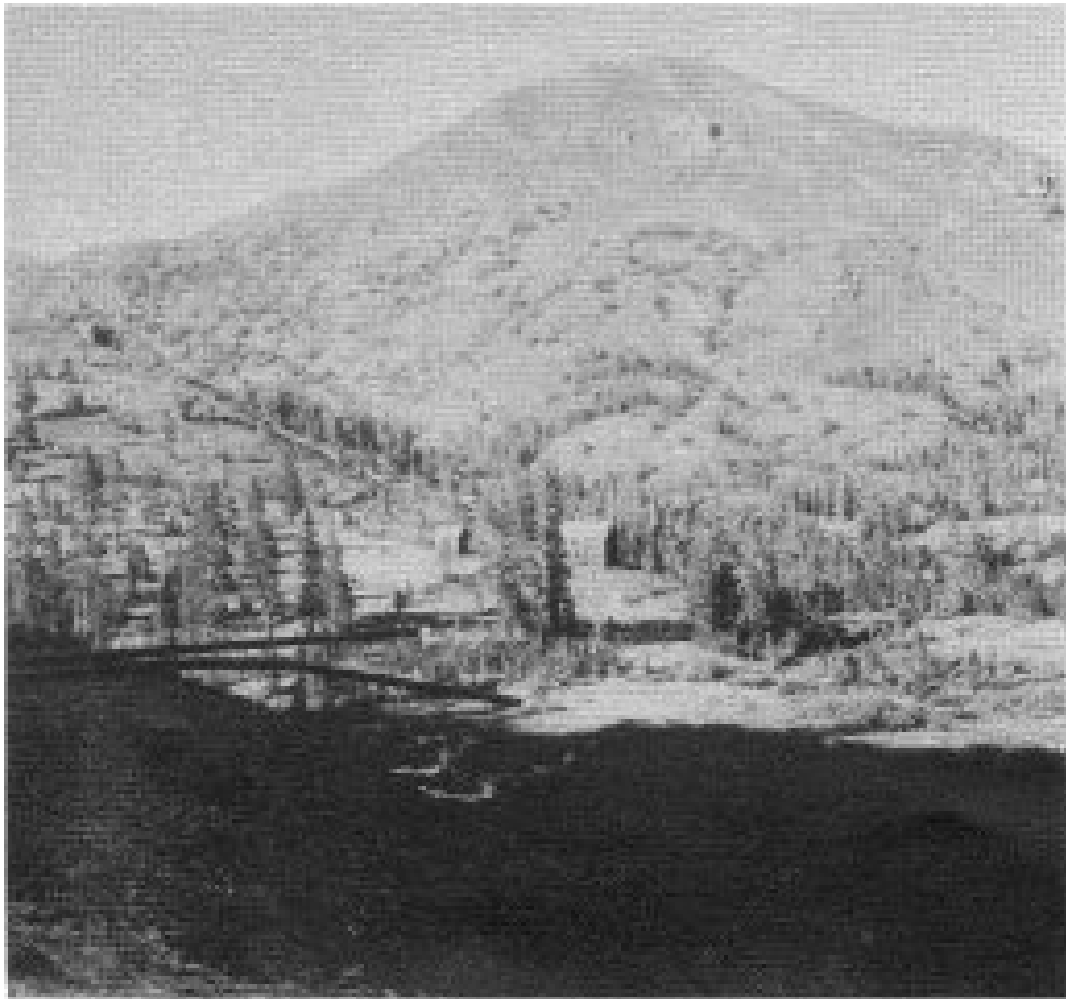


MOUNT WARREN DIVIDE (right); MOUNT CONNESS (left)



BARN, ASSAY OFFICE, MOUNT DANA





BENNETTVILLE FROM TUNNEL

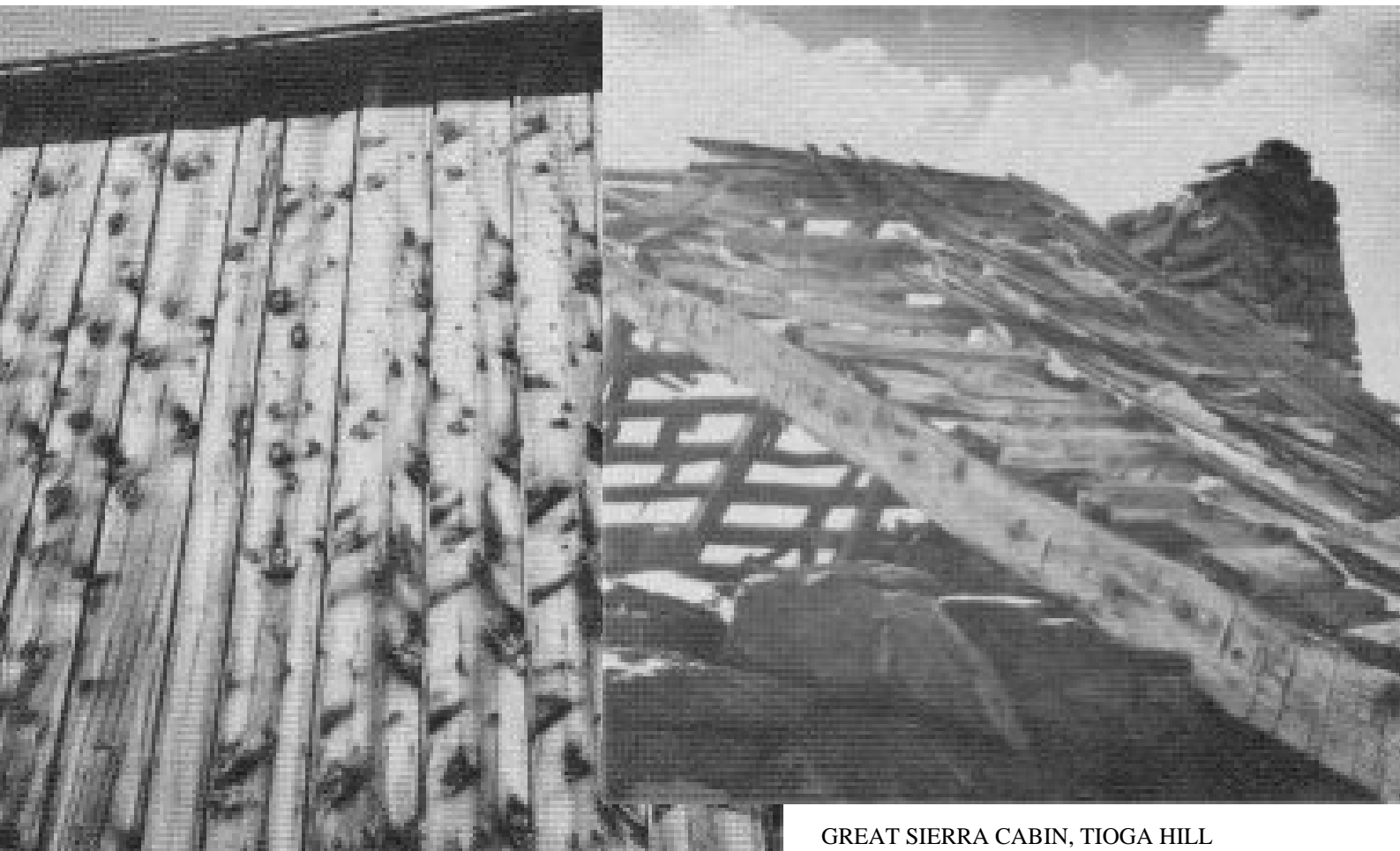
Such a storm Messrs. Carpenter and Medlicott found themselves in, on reaching the summit of Mount Warren Sunday afternoon. Fortunately the heavy wind had swept the snow from the ridge over the precipice, but the wind was so strong and the driving snow so dense that they were frequently compelled to stop, turn their backs to the storm and place their hands over their faces in order to get their breath. But the greatest danger was not encountered until they reached the depression where the wind sweeps with fearful velocity, breaking on the brow of the mountain, twisting and whirling in every direction and piling up snow in great ridges and mounds, so that, even if the atmosphere were clear, one could scarcely recognize the landmarks between which the trail winds down into the canyon with a frightful precipice on each side. When the worn-out and half-frozen men reached this point, late in the afternoon, the storm had redoubled its fury, the snow was blinding as Egyptian darkness and the atmosphere had become bitter cold. The men stopped. They could see nothing, and the roar and concussion of the wind impinging upon the mountain was painful to the ear, and the very earth trembled under the tread of the storm. A mistake here—a misstep—would be fatal, and as the men could not see their own arms' length ahead of themselves they hesitated to proceed. But to hesitate was to be lost, for the atmosphere at this point and at that hour of the day was so intensely cold, with the tempest piercing through their soaked and frozen clothes, that they could not possibly survive ten minutes. The trail curves sharply to the right as it leaves the summit to descend into the canyon. This they knew, but how to follow its course without a single landmark in sight, and avoid the precipice on the left, down which they might plunge into Lake Oneida, a mile below, in a minute, and to avoid the lofty vertical slate wall on the right, over which they might drop several hundred feet into the head of the "wash" below, this was the question. During a momentary flash of daylight through the driving snow, Judge Medlicott thought he recognized a point of rocks about which he had been surveying a year or two ago; but the apparition instantly vanished. Surveyor Carpenter started ahead, leading Medlicott so that they might keep together (the blind leading the blind), cautiously curving his course to the right as he went, but directly the wind picked him up and whirled him around and around 'till he didn't know whether he was following the curved line of beauty or the straight line of duty.. As he "lit", however, he uttered an exclamation of joy calling to his companion that they were all right. He had found a little forked stick fastened in a projecting rock, which he recognized as being on the line of the trail and below the point of danger from the precipice. Three hours more wallowing through the deep and heavy snow brought them into town, just before dark, with Carpenter still lively as a chipmunk but Judge Medlicott "a little the worse for wear"—both elaborately ornamented with icicles that jingled as merrily as sleigh bells. 43

Even skis can have their drawbacks, as a rescue team bringing a frost-bitten miner named Seymour from Bennetville to Lundy learned the hard way:

Fortunately the descent was made without serious consequences; but the worse was yet to come. One man had been detailed to take care of the eleven pairs of snow shoes, and to bring them down after the others had reached the canyon below. The shoes were all of the Norwegian pattern, varying in length from eight to eleven feet, and had been lashed together in a bundle for the descent. The man in charge had scarcely got started, however, before the bundle broke loose, and away went the 22 shoes, scampering over the precipice like a band of buffalo on a stampede. As the alarm was given and the men below looked up and saw the shower of shoes coming over the cliff, they too stampeded—all save Seymour, who was lashed to the sled and had to take the consequences. The shoes flitted by like arrows from a strong bow, missing the men but scattering in all directions through the timber and underbrush in the canyon—nearly

every shoe being broken. This left the expedition in a crippled condition. The snow down the canyon was very deep and soft, the brush and huge boulders difficult to get through, and night was coming on and the cold was intense. . . . After a long search all of the broken snow shoes were found and patched up so that they could be used. . . . 44

The group made it to camp, half-frozen but safe.



GREAT SIERRA CABIN, TIOGA HILL

WALL OF BARN, BENNETTVILLE

Sometimes there were unanticipated hazards:

C. W. Curtis and Fred McLaughlin, in descending Mount Warren to Lee Vining Creek on their way to Bennett City on Monday last, passed a large black or cinnamon bear, sitting up about 100 feet from the trail, in the scattering timber that skirts the mountain. The two men, as is of one mind, concluded to have a snowshoe race from that point down to the valley at once. . . . Fred darted down through the forest like a wild pigeon and almost instantly disappeared. Curtis got a fair start, and was not scared, but his snowshoes got frightened at the bear and bucked him off into the deep, soft snow, and while he was floundering down the hill in breathless haste, with one eye on the bear and the other on McLaughlin's trail, old Bruin sat, with arms folded, looking down on him with a placed, patronizing sort of smile. 45

Even cattle were driven over the trails, not always with success:

Burkham's circus gave an entertainment up on Tioga Hill last Sunday, The band of wild beef cattle driven over to be butchered for the Great Sierra Mining Company was abandoned in the valley of Lee Vining Creek Saturday evening and the men ascended the mountain to camp to spend the night. Sunday morning Burkham and his assistants descended to the valley early and got the cattle up to the mine in good season; but as soon as the first cow was shot the remainder of the herd scampered off in all directions, and when the last one was killed the summit of the Sierra was covered with beef for a radius of four miles! 46

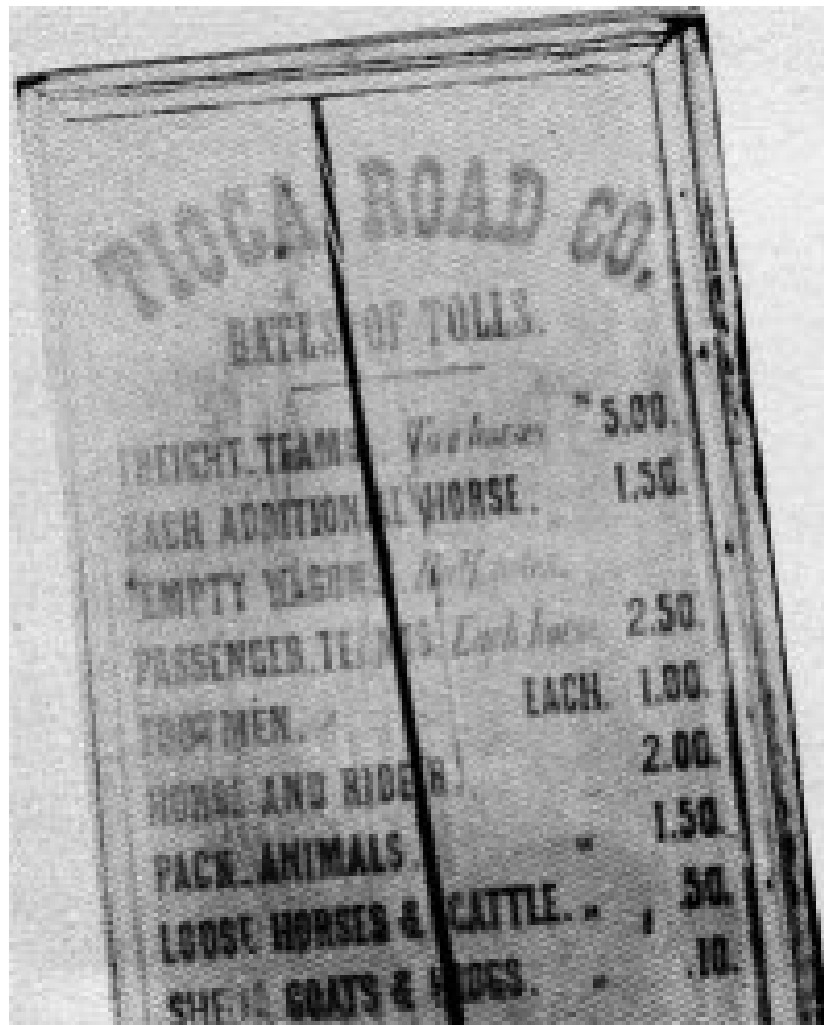
---

## 16. GREAT SIERRA WAGON ROAD



### CROCKER'S STATION WAS WESTERN TERMINUS OF THE GREAT SIERRA WAGON ROAD

THOUSANDS OF VISITORS to Yosemite National Park have traveled the famed Tioga Road, over the highest automobile pass in California, without knowing the interesting story of how it happened to be built. With the cutting of the Shepherd vein but a matter of time, the Board of Directors of the Great Sierra Company were faced with



finding a more efficient way of getting ores or concentrates to market, and for transporting supplies and equipment to Bennettville than up the trail from Lundy.

A wagon road up the more gentle western slope of the Sierra seemed to be the answer, and Charles Barney was the man to do the job. The 41 year old New Bedford engineer had as his assistant William C. Priest, builder of Priest's Grade on the Yosemite route southeast of Sonora. The men who were caught in the snowstorm on the Tioga trail, H. B. Carpenter and Harry P. Medlicott, surveyed the route and supervised the road crews.

The construction of the Great Sierra Wagon Road was an epic of western roadbuilding. A report from Barney to Bennett dated November 1, 1883 advised that, "The operations of your company for the year 1883 have been confined principally to pushing forward the tunnel for the development of the Shepherd's and Great Sierra ledges and building a wagon road to the mines. Work on the wagon road was begun on April 27, 1883 and it was carried forward without interruption or accident until finally completed September 4, 1883. The road leaves the Big Oak Flat and Yosemite Valley Stage Road at a point near Crocker's Station and continues in an easterly direction [via Aspen Valley, White Wolf, and Tuolumne Meadows] to . . . Bennettville. The total length of the road is 56½ miles and it has been constructed throughout in a most substantial manner. . .

"It is without doubt the most direct, and on account of its low grades, the easiest road for freight teams crossing the Sierra Nevada mountains, and it cannot but prove a good investment for the Company, not only on account of reducing the price of its freight at least one half, but on account of the income to be derived from tolls, which will probably be large." 47

Barney's report indicates that only 130 days were required to construct a road 56½ miles in length. Over rugged and mountainous terrain, his crew of Chinese and white laborers, some 160 strong, 48 but working almost entirely with hand tools, averaged almost one half mile a day. Cost of constructing the wagon road, which went from an elevation of 4200 feet at Crocker's Station to nearly 10,000 feet at the summit of McLean's (Tioga) Pass, was reported to have been \$61,000. 49

**August 11, 1883** — The Great Sierra Wagon Road is rapidly approaching completion. Wagons from the other side were to have reached Lake Tenaya yesterday. Harry Medlicott's graders from this side have reached the upper end of Tuolumne Meadows, while Priest's pick and shovel brigade from the other side



AUTO NEAR TIOGA PASS, ABOUT 1915



MATHER PLAQUE, TIOGA PASS

are on Rocky Canyon Creek, leaving a gap between of little more than three miles, all of which is easy grading. Priest's powder gang, following the picks and shovels, reached Lake Tenaya Thursday and will skip the heavy blasting along the margin of the lake for the present and follow up to the Tuolumne River, after which one hundred blasters will be put on to finish the three-fourths of a mile along the lake. It is believed that freight wagons will reach Tioga by or before the end of the month. The construction of this road was a stupendous and costly undertaking and the Eastern capitalists to whose enterprise and public spirit the people of this county and coast are indebted for a great thoroughfare to a hitherto inaccessible but rich and extensive mineral region, deserve to be remembered with gratitude. 50

The road was operated for a period as a toll road by William Priest, but Barney's optimism of its future was based largely on anticipated completion of an additional four miles down Lake Canyon to Lundy to give a through route across the Sierra. This stretch was never finished, and the present road down Lee Vining Canyon was not completed by the State of California until 1911. 51

The Great Sierra Wagon Road soon fell into disrepair after the collapse of the Great Sierra Company, and remained neglected until its purchased in 1915 for \$15,500 by Stephen T. Mather, dynamic first director of the National Park Service, with the help of the Sierra Club and others. 52 Following its acquisition from members of the Swift family of new Bedford, the road was deeded to the Federal Government.

Much realignment has taken place and the 21 miles of the original road remaining in use today (1958) are scheduled for realignment. But in spite of its narrowness and its steep grades this old road gives the traveler an opportunity to see and to enjoy what Jim Townsend called, "the very grandest scenery in the world." 53

And with a little imagination one can almost expect to see Barney and Priest and their sweating coolies, just around the next curve.



THE OLD TIOGA ROAD PASSED ALONG LAKE TENAYA AND THROUGH STATELY FORESTS.

---

## 17. INTRIGUE

BUT LET US RETURN to Bennettville, where dark clouds were gathering.

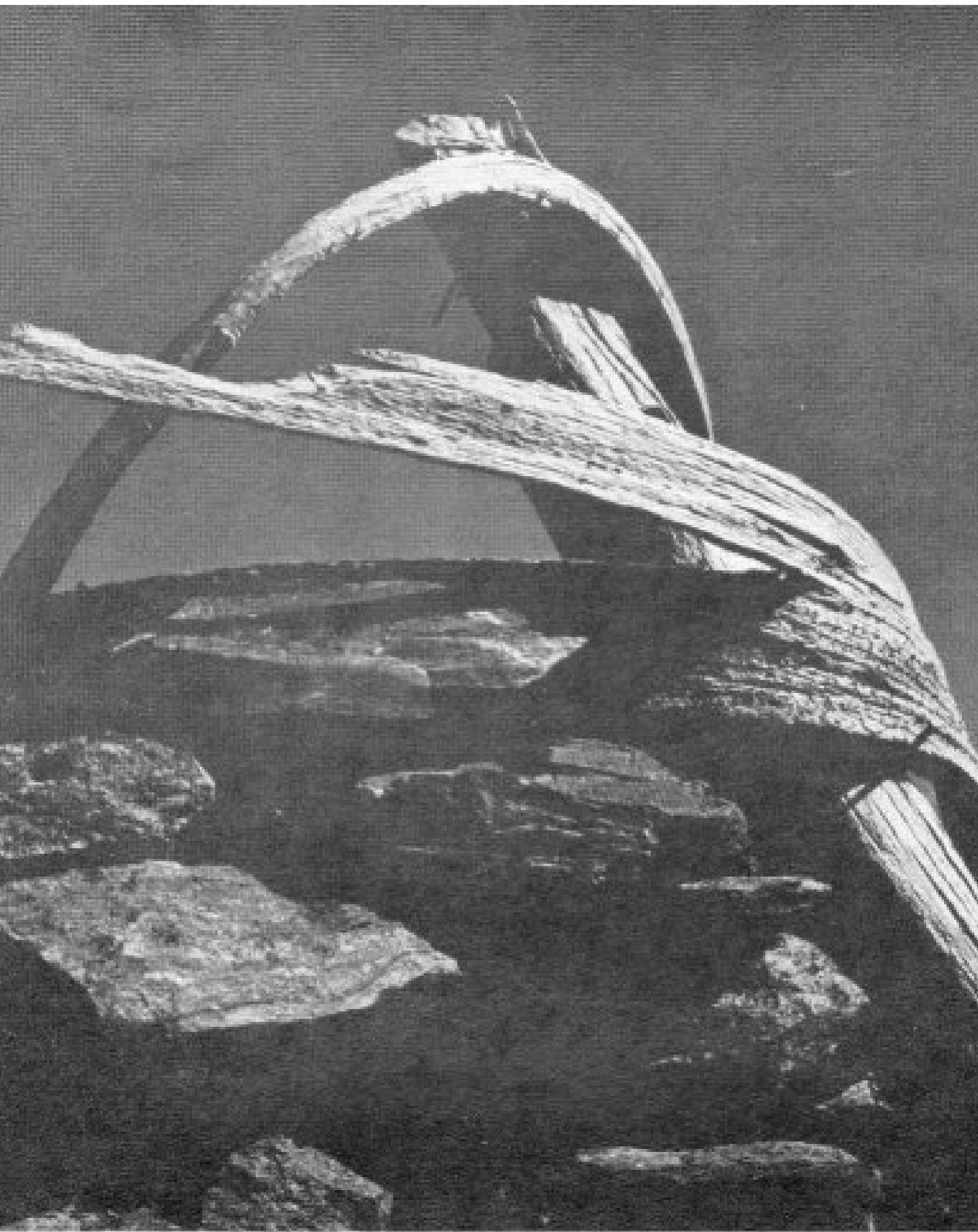
Friction is almost certain to develop wherever men work together under strain, and the Great Sierra operation was no exception. These human frailties are often not recorded and are difficult to interpret correctly in reweaving history.

In early 1883 J. C. Kemp van Ee resigned the superintendency of the Great Sierra Company, for reasons that are not known to us now. Charles Barney returned from New Bedford to take his place. Perhaps it was Oliver H. Brooks, organizer, who was now throwing a monkey wrench into the Great Sierra machinery. Indications were that he had fallen into the poor graces of the *Index* editor:

**October 27, 1883** — A rumor gained currency here a few days ago to the effect that O. H. Brooks would be out here in a few days. It is not at all probable, however, that the “promising” O. H. will ever again press the soil of Mono County. 54

Or could it have been Jeff McClelland, who had been driving the tunnel since its beginning?

**January 5, 1884** — T. J. McClelland, late acting superintendent for the Great Sierra Company at Tioga, quit suddenly last Thursday, passed through Lundy



TWISTED TIMBER, DANA VILLAGE

the same day, took private conveyance from Bodie yesterday, and is believed to have left the country for good. 55

**January 12** — The **Bodie Free Press** says that T. J. McClelland . . . went to San Francisco and that he will thence today, via Panama, for the West Coast of Africa, to superintend a mine owned jointly by an English and a San Francisco Company. If his new employers knew how Jeff treated the last company that gave him employment we think that they would feel a little “ticklish” about entrusting him with the superintendency of a property in far-away Africa. So far as we have been able to ascertain, McClelland simply abandoned the property and important work entrusted to him, in mid-winter, and without a word to his Eastern employers, and precipitately fled the country. Just why, no one seems to know; but it is just such conduct as this that leads Eastern capitalists to distrust Pacific Coast miners, and to employ in their stead Eastern men of known integrity but far less knowledge of mining\*. The Index intimated to the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company of New Bedford, when it allowed the intrigues and malice of a marplot\*\* to deprive the company of the services of a thoroughly reliable and energetic man\*\*\* that it would be difficult to fill his place, and the company has been in hot water more or less ever since. . . . We understand that the company will send a man out from the East to take charge of their Tioga property, and in the meantime Wm. Onkst has been placed in charge of tunnel work. 56

**January 19** — W. C. Priest of Priest’s Station, near Big Oak Flat, has been appointed General Superintendent of the Great Sierra . . . at Bennettville, Tioga. This is a case of “the right man in the right place.” Mr. Priest is a pioneer California miner, an intelligent, affable gentleman, devoid of guile, and . . . incapable of indulging in any of the petty intrigues and bickerings with which that camp has been cursed since O. H. Brooks left it a legacy of delirium tremens. . . . 57

*\*Barney? \*\*Brooks? \*\*\*Kemp?*

---

## 18. SUSPENSE

A PARTY OF FOUR of the directors together had visited the properties in the summer of 1882 and found the extent, condition, and promise of them “much better than . . . had been reported:

‘The naked-eye characteristics of the ore, the quantities of ore exposed and on the ore dumps, its assay value and the estimated bullion value, have been in no manner misrepresented. The relative position of the ledges in respect to the situation of the tunnel, are most favorable, affording an exceedingly cheap avenue for the extraction of ore, with ready access to the contemplated mills. An ample quantity and fall of water is contiguous for extensive motive power if desired; wood is abundant. In brief, the company possesses all the needed elements for mining and milling upon a comprehensive scale with the least possible expense. From information collected from experienced men we are satisfied that the entire outlay per ton of ore, both mining and milling, will not exceed two and a half dollars.

‘Our visit of inspection has given us great gratification; we are satisfied that the company is in possession of mines of great wealth.’ ”

Signed:

Almon Brooks

Jos. J. Parker

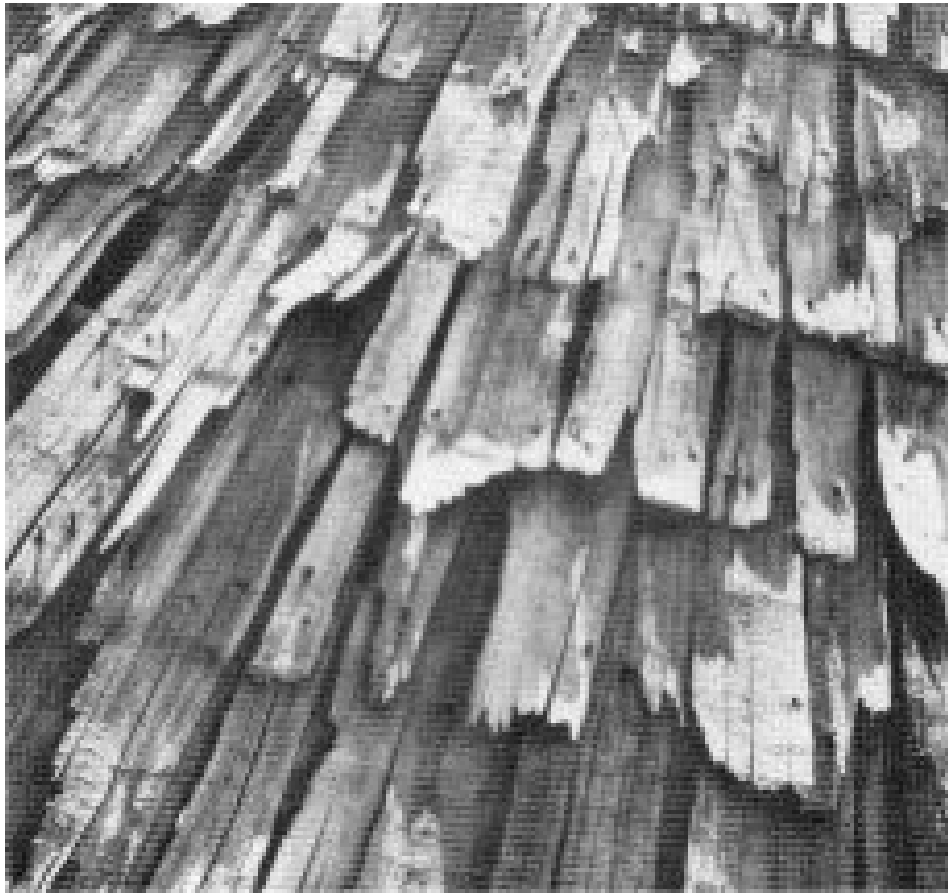
R. N. Swift

Wm. C. N. Swift

Directors 58

The prospect of such an enormous yield when the great ore veins of the Shepherd was reached by the tunnel caused the directors to advance the treasury stock from \$1 per share to \$2. A short time later it was advanced to \$5 and trouble began. This move stopped all sales, and to secure money for operating expenses, loans were obtained from individuals and banks, the latter by three of the directors endorsing the company’s notes and taking treasury stock as collateral. Charles Barney had made his reconnaissance to Bennettville. The directors had “entire confidence in his honesty, and he made to us such unqualified reports of the very great value and enormous extent of the mines in question that we had no doubt of their value, and hence our willingness to advance funds and take the responsibilities.”





SHINGLES ON SHAFT HOUSE, DANA VILLAGE

At the mine all eyes were on the tunnel being ground slowly but steadily through slate and quartzite toward the Sheepherder.

“When Mr. Barney returned to New Bedford . . . he at once interviewed Mr. Bennett and told him that it would never do to make an exact report of the properties, as the ledges were so very great, and the quantities of ore and their assay value so large, that such a report would be considered an exaggeration, as such a state of things would be deemed an impossibility by experienced mining engineers, and his report, therefore, was toned-down and made very conservative. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

The tunnel progressed steadily.

**April 5, 1884** — Jim Campbell went to Tioga Wednesday on snowshoes, packing 48 pounds of dope for the journals of the machinery at the Great Sierra tunnel. 59

At a cost of \$10,687.40, new and heavy machinery was ordered from Parke and Lacy of San Francisco of sufficient strength and capacity to more than quadruple the amount and speed of the work in driving the tunnel. 60 It never reached Bennettville.

In every mail leaving Bennettville a progress report was sent to President Bennett in New Bedford, giving conditions in the tunnel, at the saw mill, on the wagon road, and the weather.

Things looked good at Bennettville:

**May 31, 1884** — The tunnel of the Great Sierra Con. S. Co. is being steadily pushed for the Sheepherder Lode . . . the adit being in, at the first of the present week, about 1,632 feet. A good deal of anxiety prevails, from ocean to ocean, over the progress of this great work, and some very silly speculations, croaking, and predictions have been indulged in about it by the uninformed—such as that the Sheepherder had been cut and found to be extremely rich; that it had been cut and found to be barren; that the place where it ought to have been had been passed and no lode found . . . At 23 feet a week it will take exactly seven weeks from last Monday to make 161 feet—so that the Sheepherder vein should be reached on Monday, the 14th of July next. . . .

And some day, not far distant, the development of these almost-limitless sources of wealth will place Mono county far in advance, as a bullion producer, of any other similar area or territory on the continent or in the world—and to no one corporation or association will so much credit be due for this result as to the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company and its chief stockholders, Thomas Bennett, Jr. and Wm. C. N. Swift of New Bedford, Massachusetts, who have already expended some hundreds of thousands of dollars on development work in Tioga District and in the construction of an excellent and costly wagon road (the Tioga Road) to that lofty and theretofore inaccessible region. May their reward be speedy and commensurate with their unflinching faith, indefatigable energy, and daring enterprise, is the universal sentiment of the people of this section. 61

A move by one of the Eastern stockholders, possibly William Swift, secured a sufficient number of shares to give control to that group. This may be where Judge Joseph Parker bowed out. Relations in the company were strained, with the East carrying the major financial burden. But matters remained comparatively quiet and tunnel work progressed until the close of the year 1883 when the company was without money, all of its treasury stock pledged as security and the stockholders refusing to make further loans on the company's paper.<sup>7</sup> 1

NEW HAVEN, N.Y., J. 1884

T. H. S.

Stockholder in the Great Sierra Silver Co.

DEAR SIR:

This will inform you that the amount of the indebtedness of

*The Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company*on the first day of January, 1884, amounted, in the aggregate, to \$ 225,236 <sup>61</sup>/<sub>100</sub>.

It has now become necessary that this indebtedness should be paid, and also that a provision of money should be made to meet the expenses of continuing work on the mines for their development, and until they can be made productive enough to obtain an income from them. It is expected the Sheepshenders Ledge will be cut by the tunnel some time during the next two months, unless the dip in the ledge to the east is less than 60 degrees, which we are now disposed to think it is, by the position of the strata, through which the tunnel is passing, being almost perpendicular, or a slight inclination to the west. The perpendicular distance of the centre of the Sheepshenders Ledge from the starting point of the tunnel is 1793 feet. By the report from the mines of December 30, 1883, the tunnel was then in 1317 feet, and if requisite to run the tunnel the whole distance of 1793 feet before cutting the Sheepshenders Ledge, would make the distance to be run, 476 feet, or about 120 days' work, which would bring the time to the latter part of April next.

The members of the Executive Committee, upon whom has devolved the labor and responsibility of procuring the money for all the expenses for what has been done, now find it impossible to proceed any further in obtaining more money to keep the work going on, and have ordered all the work at the mines, to be stopped on the first day of February, 1884, unless relief is given by the Stockholders to the Executive Committee by furnishing them with the necessary amount of money, by consenting to an assessment of fifty cents per share, work at the mines cannot be resumed.

The amount herein proposed would enable the company to go on with its work to cut the Sheepshenders Ledge, to erect mills, and get the mines in a productive condition. We are confident that the result will show the company is the possessor of one of the largest and most valuable mining properties now in existence, and which, today, shows more promising than it has done at any time during the existence of the company. Since last August there has been encountered in the course of the tunnel, occasionally, stringers or feeders of a very fine milling ore, assaying from ten dollars to twenty-seven dollars per ton, more than three-quarters gold.

The experts say that this must necessarily be a part of the Sheepshenders Ledge and thrown out from it in the form of stringers and feeders at that depth, and undoubtedly the ore of the Sheepshenders Ledge will be of that character.

They also say that it resembles closely in appearance and quality, the Comstock bonanza ore, although not so rich.

We are confident that it will be a very serious mistake on the part of the Stockholders if they do not promptly furnish the amount of money called for, and have continued progress made on the mines until they are in successful operation, and if they do not come forward to the relief of the company as here proposed, the work cannot be resumed.

All the Treasury stock of the Company to the amount of *146,000* Shares has been pledged as collateral security on a part of the indebtedness of the Company, and from the money to be received from the Stockholders, this Treasury stock will all be released and available to the Company for future use. Please give your immediate attention to this matter and forward me your decision whether you will, or not, furnish the fifty cents per share on the amount of the stock held by you.

If I do not hear from you, I shall conclude that you decline to make the payment.

Very respectfully yours,

*Wm. L. Smith Jr.*

President.

By Order of the  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

Circular No. 2

NEW YORK

To *Mr*

*Stockholder in the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company*

DEAR SIR: At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Directors of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company held this day, it was decided to appeal again for the requisite assistance to those Shareholders in the Company who have not as yet contributed their proportion of the loan to the Company to the amount of fifty cents per share of their holding of the Stock, as set forth in the circular of January 16th and February 1st, 1884. The money loaned to the Company by a portion of the Stockholders since the first of February last has all been expended in advancing the tunnel, and the Company is now without money or resources to go on with the work unless it is furnished by those Stockholders who have not already done so, and unless they now come forward to the relief of the Company as the others have done, all work at the mines will have to be stopped on the *30<sup>th</sup>* instant.

On the 16th day of January last when the circular was issued, the tunnel was then in 1317 feet, and up to the 11th of the present month it had been advanced 323 feet, making the total distance 1710 feet. The last week, as per report No. 71, from June 2d to 9th, it was extended 41 feet. The formation through which the tunnel has passed since it reached 1633 feet has been very favorable; clay, water and quartz were encountered at that time, and we are confident that the tunnel is in close proximity to the ledge. It is now of the utmost importance for the success of the Company that this work shall not be stopped at this time, but at least carried on till the ledge is reached, and cross cut to determine something definite of its value, either for the future operations of the Company or for a sale of the property.

The Executive Committee have given this matter their constant thought and careful attention, and their conclusion is that the properties are of great value, and that very large incomes can be derived from them when they are in productive operation. They therefore recommend those Stockholders who have not contributed their loans to the Company to do so at once and enable it to go on with the work.

The annual meeting of the Company, held at Chicago on the 31 instant, was so limited in the number of its Stockholders in attendance, although the stock was represented by more than five-sixths of the shares, personally and by proxy, it was impossible to present this matter as had been previously determined at that meeting for the Stockholders' decisive action upon it, therefore it has become necessary to reach the Stockholders through this circular, as the stoppage of the work will result disastrously to the Stockholders.

It is now the request of the Executive Committee that you return to me immediately, by mail, your decision, and stating what you will or will not do in contributing your proportion of the loan to the Company for the purposes herein set forth.

Very respectfully yours,

*W. T. Furness Jr.*

President

WITH AFFAIRS in this unfavorable condition the Executive Committee of the Directors decided to appeal to the stockholders for a loan of fifty cents per share on their holdings. On January 16, 1884 a circular was sent informing them that the indebtedness of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company on January 1 amounted to \$225,236.38, and that money would have to be provided to meet the expenses of continuing work on the mine.

The amount proposed would enable the company to go on with its work to cut the Sheepherder Lode, expected to take place within two months, to erect mills, and get the mine in productive condition. "We are confident that the result will show the company is the possessor of one of the largest and most valuable mining properties now in existence."

The appeal brought a response from a number of the Eastern stockholders and a few of the Western, which enabled the operation to continue for a short time. But the situation remained critical. Since a majority of the Western stockholders were not heard from it was decided to send a second circular. 62

"The money loaned to the company by a portion of the stockholders since the first of February last has all been expended in advancing the tunnel, and the company is now without money or resources to go on with the work unless it is furnished by those stockholders who have not already done so, and unless they now come to the relief of the company as the others have done, all work at the mines will have to be stopped on the thirtieth instant." 1

---

## 20. COLLAPSE

EXCITEMENT REACHED A CRESCENDO in the Tioga district as the date neared for cutting the Sheepherder Lode. Finally the word was out—the ledge had been cut! But a word of caution appeared in the *Index*:

As to the reported strike in the Great Sierra tunnel. . . it will be well to await reliable information, as outsiders are not yet allowed to know anything about the importance of the strike. That the Sheepherder lode has been cut into is certain; but there is nothing surprising or exciting in that fact, as such a strike was inevitable. As we understand it, two series of shots were put into the solid quartz after it was reached, and no one but the foreman has been into the tunnel since the last series of blasts were exploded, and we doubt if even he has taken any steps to ascertain the value of the rock. To us the Sheepherder lode has been an open book ever since we first examined the outcrop, some years ago. . . . The temporary suspension of work in the tunnel has no significance of consequence to the public. 63

But it had great significance, in spite of this whistling in the dark by the *Index* editor. The second plea to the stockholders failed as completely as had the first with the Western stockholders. The New Bedford men were convinced that the heading of the tunnel was now so far advanced that it might cut the Sheepherder at any time. If and when this happened the delinquent stockholders would share equally without having risked their money or having carried any of the responsibilities.

With heavy hearts the Executive Committee made the fatal decision on July 3, 1884—that the time had come to suspend all operations. Orders were telegraphed to the Superintendent to do so immediately. Thomas Bennett said that the action taken was "to the great detriment of the Stockholders' interests as the heading of the tunnel was at 1784 feet, and without doubt . . . within 200 feet of the great Sheepherder's Ledge, doubtless one of the largest and richest ore bodies at present in existence in this country. . . ." 1

**July 12, 1884** — A party of Great Sierra miners, taking advantage of the temporary suspension of work in the tunnel, have gone over to Parker Lake to catch trout. 64

As day after day went by and no word was received to return to work, the miners began straggling off to seek other employment, and Bennettville became deserted—a ghost city with only Charles Barney and one or two others busy storing property and greasing up the machinery at the tunnel. On October 19, 1884 Barney wrote from the Palace Hotel in San Francisco to William Swift in New Bedford:



**PALACE HOTEL**

A. D. SHARON, Esq.

San Francisco, Oct. 19<sup>th</sup> 1881

A. C. W. Swift, Esq.  
Dear Sir

Landed here last evening. He got out of the mountains with the pack animals just in time. Came over the Road to Corcoran, and was detained there two days by a very heavy storm. There is about three feet of snow at Doga. This storm was unusually severe for this



THE CLOTHING, GROCERIES AND SUCH . . . WERE PACKED IN THE LOFT OF THE BARN . . .

“We got out of the mountains with the pack animals just in time. Came over the [Great Sierra Wagon] Road to Crockers and was detained there two days by a heavy storm .. unusually severe for this season. The Road is in very good condition and will probably remain so during the winter and spring . . . I think \$1000 expended next year after the snow is gone will put it in as good shape as ever. We left everything at Bennettville safe and secure as possible.

“All the machinery, tools and supplies, were put into the tunnel, and the tunnel securely fastened. The clothing, groceries and such supplies as would be injured by dampness were packed in the loft of the barn, which is the best and strongest of the buildings. All the assay supplies were put away carefully and nothing was left undone to make all safe . . . . The driver upset the stage in coming out of Chinese Camp with us Friday morning and as a consequence I got my head cut and bruised quite severely. I am still quite lame and sore from the effects of it but will probably be all right in a few days. . . .

Yours,  
Charles E. Barney” 64

I am still quite lame and sore from the effects  
of it but will probably be all right in  
a few days.

I will write again after I have seen the  
Surveyor Genl. in regard to the lands and  
patents.

Yours Char. Barney.

---

21. SHERIFF'S SALE

**Superior Court**

*[Handwritten text: Court of the County of Santa Clara, No. 700]*

*[Handwritten text: In the Superior Court of Santa Clara County, California]*

*[Handwritten text: Plaintiff, The First National Bank of Santa Clara]*

*[Handwritten text: Defendant, J. M. ...]*

*[Handwritten text: Return to the writ of execution ...]*

*[Handwritten text: I have found no other property ...]*

**STELLA WARRICK**  
DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE

Receipt for the ...

No. 107 One Hundred ...

[Signature]

**No Receipts to be**

*[Handwritten text: I have found no other property ...]*

*[Handwritten text: ...]*

*[Handwritten text: ...]*

*[Handwritten text: ...]*

*[Handwritten text: ...]*



TOM BENNETT, William Swift and the others in New Bedford thought it would be a simple matter of reorganizing and eliminating deadwood from the company to get the mine open again and the elusive Shepherder vein cut.

But as time went on and nothing was done the Eastern stockholders became uneasy and began devising plans for protecting their interests. As a first step—to learn the value of the properties against which their claims were pending, they sent William Swift to Bennettville with Captain Bickford Anthony, an English mining engineer.

In a report made after his inspection of the lodes, Captain Anthony estimated a mineral value of ore in sight on the Shepherder Lode of \$9,642,840, and on the High Rock claim of the Great Sierra Lode, \$2,700,000, or a total value, not counting the Bevan claim, of \$12,360,840. <sup>1</sup> This encouraged the stockholders, but in early 1887, to establish their claims legally, they assigned them to William Swift as trustee.

In June 1887 Swift brought suit in Cook County, Illinois, against the Great Sierra Company, the judgment was obtained to the full amount of the claims—\$277,083.<sup>86</sup>

Since all available property of the company was in California the judgment of the Illinois court was taken to the Superior Court of Mono County, California, and again rendered in the full amount. By order of that court the properties were sold in 1888 at public auction by the sheriffs of Mono, Tuolumne, and San Francisco counties and were purchased by William C. N. Swift, Trustee, for \$167,050. <sup>65</sup>

But the spark was dead. More than \$300,000 had been spent and the men who had driven the project so hard were tired. Tom Bennett was 67, William Swift, 73. The others had faded out of the picture. Both men died in New Bedford at the age of 77—Swift in May 1892 and Bennett in April 1898—believing to the end in their empty dreams of a vast fortune, which never came true.

---

## 22. LAST HOPE

BUT HOPE DID NOT DIE with William Swift. Down through the Swift family went the legend of the fortune to be found in Tioga Hill. After the death of William it was learned that he was indebted to his older brother Rhodolphus in the amount of \$145,000. In settlement of this obligation the Tioga property was transferred to Rhodolphus and, following his death in 1901, to his heirs. <sup>66</sup>

It was Antoinette, widow of Rhodolphus' son Edward, who once again started the pneumatic drills chattering in the Shepherder Tunnel. She was successful in interesting a group of western men in the possibilities at Tioga, and after several long years of probating estates and clearing titles, work was resumed in 1933.

Using modern equipment the tunnel was driven several, hundred feet farther without striking the Shepherder Lode. And even after the second ill-fated operation had ended, William R. Palmer, the engineer in charge at the tunnel reported: "With a large body of low grade ore at this point of minimum richness already cut by the tunnel, the probabilities of cutting these chimneys of high grade ore by drifting on the veins is very great. This property, while not a fully-developed mine, is far beyond a prospect and shows . . . very strong indications, practically definite, of the existence of large persistent ore chimneys extending to great depth, much richer in precious metals." <sup>67</sup>

This saga of Tioga ended in 1949 with the death of Antoinette Swift and the subsequent sale, for taxes, of the Great Sierra claims.

From high above Tioga Hill, Bennett, Parker and the Swifts, with their crews of now-forgotten miners, keep silent watch over the rusting machinery, the old buildings of Bennettville, and the empty tunnel, its dripping waters echoing ghostly voices of the past— all that remain to tell the story of the will-'o-the-wisp that was Tioga.



WEATHERED BUILDING, BENNETTVILLE

---

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

(Note: *HMI* is *Homer Mining Index*, once published at Lundy, Mono Co., California.)

1 Bennett, Thomas, Jr. *Statement of Origin, Account of Financial Management, and Sale of Properties by Court Order, of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company*. New Bedford, Mass. February 15, 1890.

2 HMI. January 5, 1884.

3 *Mining Records*, Mono Co., Calif. Book Q, p 343. Bridgeport. August 9, 1880.

4 HMI. November 26, 1881.

5 *Mining Records*, Mono Co., Calif. Book R, p 545. Bridgeport. August 2, 1878.

6 HMI. November 26, 1881.

7 HMI. December 2, 1881.

8 HMI. January 1, 1881.

- 9 HMI. September 4, 1894.
- 10 HMI from *Virginia Chronicle*, Virginia City, Nevada. May 27, 1882.
- 11 HMI. October 2, 1880.
- 12 HMI. July 7, 1894.
- 13 HMI. December 18, 1880.
- 14 HMI. March 19, 1881.
- 15 HMI. April 6, 1881.
- 16 Personal letter to author from Miss Sylvia H. Knowles. New Bedford, Mass. February 5, 1955.
- 17 HMI. February 18. 1882.
- 18 Lord, Russell F., *Report to O. H. Brooks*. San Francisco September 5, 1881.
- 19 Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company, *Articles of Incorporation*. Secretary of State, Springfield, Illinois. November 10, 1881.
- 20 HMI. November 12, 1881.
- 21 HMI. February 18, 1882.
- 22 HMI. November 12, 1881.
- 23 HMI. November 19, 1881.
- 24 HMI. February 25, 1882.
- 25 HMI. January 21, 1882.
- 26 HMI. February 11, 1882.
- 27 HMI. February 18, 1882.
- 28 HMI. March 4, 1882.
- 29 HMI. March 25, 1882.
- 30 HMI. February 18, 1882.
- 31 HMI. May 31, 1884.
- 32 HMI. January 19, 1884.
- 33 HMI. October 27, 1883.
- 34 Russell, Carl P., *100 Years in Yosemite*. Yosemite National Park. 1957.
- 35 *Mining Records*, Mono County, California, Book B, pp. 386-387. Bridgeport. August 30, 1880.
- 36 HMI. August 15, 1883.
- 37 Identification by Dr. B. F. Kukachka, USFS Forest Products Laboratory, Madison, Wisconsin. December 29, 1954.
- 38 National Archives and Record Service, Washington, D.C. Letter of November 1, 1954.
- 39 HMI. March 11, 1882.
- 40 HMI. May 27, 1882.
- 41 HMI. January 22, 1881.
- 42 HMI. February 5, 1881.
- 43 HMI. December 10, 1881.
- 44 HMI. February 25, 1882.
- 45 HMI. February 18, 1882.
- 46 HMI. November 5, 1881.
- 47 Barney, Charles E., *Report to Thomas Bennett, Jr.* New Bedford, November 3, 1883.
- 48 HMI. June 23, 1883.
- 49 *Report of the Commission on Roads in Yosemite National Park, California*. Senate Document 155, 56th Congress, 1st Session. Washington, D.C. 1900.
- 50 HMI. August 11, 1883.
- 51 Curtin, Senator John B. *Statement before subcommittee of the Committee on the Public Lands on H. R. 21718, for the purchase of the Tioga Road*. Washington, D.C. March 18, 1912.
- 52 Shankland, Robert, *Steve Mather of the National Parks*, p. 62, New York. 1951.
- 53 HMI. October 13, 1894.
- 54 HMI. October 27, 1883.
- 55 HMI. January 5, 1884.
- 56 HMI. January 12, 1884.
- 57 HMI. January 19, 1884.
- 58 *Report of the Directors who visited the Properties of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company in July-August 1882*. Bennettville, Calif. August 1882.
- 59 HMI. April 5, 1884.
- 60 Bennett, Thomas, Jr., et al., *Report of the Great Sierra Mining Properties, Mono County, California*. New Bedford. February 15, 1890.
- 61 HMI. May 31, 1884.
- 62 *Circulars 1 and 2 to Stockholders of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Co. New Bedford. January 16 and June 18, 1884.*
- 63 HMI. July 12, 1884.
- 64 HMI. July 12, 1884.
- 65 *Indentures and Certificates of Sale*, Sheriffs Watkin Morgan (Mono County), George McQuade (Tuolumne County), and William McMann (San Francisco County) of property of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company. 1888.
- 66 *Indenture of Settlement*. Estate of William C. N. Swift to Rhodolphus N. Swift. New Bedford. August 18, 1894.
- 67 Palmer, William R., *Report to Tioga Mining Company*. Los Angeles. June 13, 1939.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

Sincere thanks are extended for the following photographs, which supplement the author's:

*Captain at Crocker's Station:* Celia Crocker Thompson, courtesy Yosemite Museum.

*May Lundy Mill:* Frasher's, Pomona, California.

*"Lying Jim" Townsend:* California State Library.

*Lundy, Home of the Homer Mining Index:* Frasher's, Pomona.

*Thomas Bennett, Jr.:* C. F. Broughton, Wamsutta Mills, New Bedford.

*Stock Subscription, GSCSCo.:* Secretary of State, State of Illinois.

*Machinery at Tunnel:* Wayne Bryant, NPS.

*Saddlebags Lake, Frozen:* Dr. Harold Bradley.

*Old Lundy, Winter:* Frashers, Pomona.

*Mt. Dana Looks Down on Bennettville, 1898:* Celia Crocker Thompson, courtesy Yosemite Museum.

*Winter near Bennettville:* Dr. Harold Bradley.

*Crocker's Station, Western Terminus:* Celia Crocker Thompson, courtesy Yosemite Museum.

*Automobile near Tioga Pass:* Pillsbury? Courtesy Yosemite Museum.

*Documents, Great Sierra Co.:* Courtesy Stanley F. Davie and Chas. S. Wheeler.

## YOU WILL BE GLAD TO KNOW

*that the National Park Service is preserving many interesting things which are part of the story of the Ghost Mines of Yosemite. You may see the mining machinery which was dragged up the Sierra Nevada to Bennettville the winter of 1882 at the Wawona Pioneer Village in Yosemite National Park. There, too, are a pole, insulator, and wire from "the highest telephone line in the world". An exhibit entitled Mining Excitement may be seen at the Yosemite Museum.*

*An active program is underway to stabilize and interpret the pioneer cabins in Yosemite. Included are the Great Sierra Cabin on Tioga Hill and the Golden Crown cabins in Mono Pass.*

---

## A NOTE OF APPRECIATION



GREAT SIERRA SHAFT HOUSE



HOISTING WINCH, TIOGA HILL  
GOLDEN CROWN CABINS. MOUNT LEWIS ON SKYLINE



MANY PEOPLE helped reweave the broken strands of the history of these old Yosemite mines. An old letterhead found in the stable in Bennettville led to the late Thomas Boss, who played a part in the second operation of the mine. From New York the trail doubled back to California and to Thomas' son James Boss. From James we learned of Charles S. Wheeler, Jr. and Stanley F. Davie, attorneys, who had preserved meticulously every available scrap of paper pertaining to the mines and who generously made them available for study.

Without the microfilm copies of the Homer Mining Index made for the Yosemite Museum by the University of California's Bancroft Library, piecing the story together would have been much more difficult. Miss Sylvia H. Knowles of New Bedford, Massachusetts, granddaughter of Rhodolphus Swift, provided pertinent information and loaned photographs of her family.

Last but not least I express appreciation to my colleagues in the National Park Service. Their understanding and appreciation of the importance of preserving the facts and the artifacts of this facet of western history run deep.

---

Also From The Awani Press:

*Animal Friends of the Sierra*

*Animal Friends of the Northwest*

*In Old Virginia City*

*A Day with Tupi, an Indian Boy of the Sierra*

CROWN PRINTING & LITHOGRAPHING CO.





WHITEBARK PINE, TIOGA HILL

---



Digitized by  
Yosemite Online Library

<http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library>

Dan Anderson