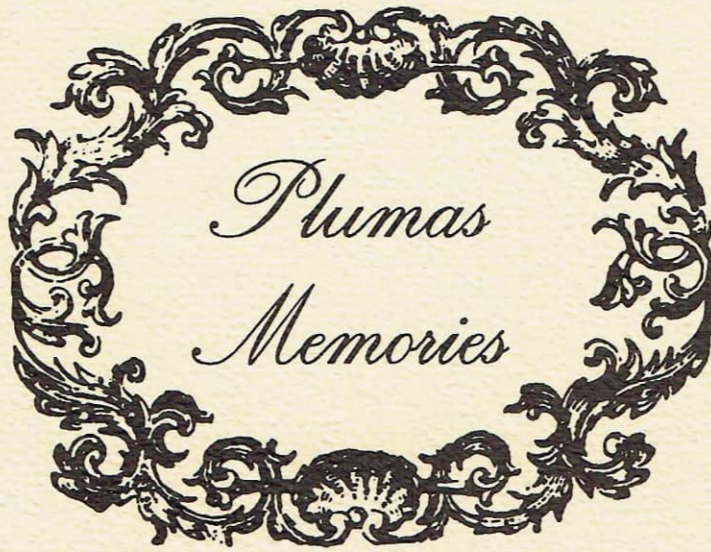


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The Life and Times
of
LAPORTE

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THE NAMING OF WHISKEY CREEK  
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LAPORTE



SCHOOL

GIBSONVILLE

FLOURISHING TOWN
WITH GOLD BENEATH
ITS HOMES & STREETS



FREIGHT & THE U. S. MAIL



THE NAMING OF WHISKEY CREEK

By Jack Sanford, grandson of Mrs. Ruth (Clough) Sanford, who was the daughter of the late Judge Clough, pioneer resident of Quincy. Jack's grandfather, G. P. Sanford, had charge of the erecting and operation of the first electric light plant in Quincy, owned and financed by Barney Schneider, Quincy druggist. Mrs. Margaret (Judge) Varena supplied the poem for the Historical Society publication.

In a spot in the high Sierra; where the winters are cold and bleak
There's a place that the old-time miners once nicknamed "Whiskey Creek",

There are lots of different stories as to how it got that name,
But this is the way it was told to me--and the tale is true, they claim

On a claim way up near Gibson, two miners struck it rich;
The news spread round like wildfire; they were all at fever pitch.

For though gold had come from the creek beds, for many miles around;
This strike was the very first one, to be made on higher ground.

About that time a freighter pulled up from down the grade
With a wagon load of "likker", he'd brought for gold to trade.

These miners that struck it rich, then bought up the whole darn load;
Twelve barrels of good old whiskey for their strike--the drinks they owed.

They knew they'd made enough there; they'd never mine again.
So they hauled the whiskey up the hill to treat the other men.

Well, the whole camp celebrated till most could drink no more,
And these who'd come without a bed were sleeping on the floor.

Some tipsy miner noticed one barrel was getting low
So he went to tap a new one--for the "likker" had to flow!

The hill was pretty steep there and as he fumbled round
He tipped one barrel over and away it started down!

It took two others with it and tumbled down the hill
And when they hit the creek bed, their contents they did spill!

The stage coach driver stopping for water at this stream
Knew nothing of the accident as he filled his dry canteen.

He took a drink..another; then he started in to shout--
Nobody in the stage coach knew what it was all about!

He filled up all the buckets and he made the welkin ring;
Instead of finding gold--he had found a WHISKEY SPRING!

When he got up to the diggings, and he told it round about,
About the whiskey creek he'd claimed, the story soon got out.

So he didn't try to claim it, but went sadly on his way;
But the name of "Whiskey Creek" stayed on; its known by that today!

There are some up in these mountains who'll swear that this is true--
But here's the story anyway; I'll leave it up to you.

GIBSONVILLE

by: Mrs. Margaret (Judge) Varena

Note: This account was written expressly for this Historical Society publication by Mrs. Margaret (Judge) Varena, a native of Gibsonville and one of the three children of Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Judge Sr. pioneer residents of that area. Margaret graduated from the Plumas County High School in 1918.

In the early 1850's an enterprising and intelligent prospector by the name of Gibson discovered rich deposits of gold bearing gravel in a "remote" section of the Northern Sierra County, California. Word of his good fortune spread rapidly and soon others flocked to the area, staked claims, and the "camp" of Gibsonville was born. It developed into a large and thriving community, which, at its height of fame, boasted a population of approximately five thousand people. This included besides Gibsonville, inhabitants of Mt. Pleasant, Newark (Shiskey Diggings) and Hepsidam--all within a three mile area.

Underground tunnels were driven to obtain the placer deposits, which, in some instances "paid" twelve to Twenty-five feet above bed rock. From the main tunnel the gravel on the sides was worked by "breasting" and overhead by "stoping". As the tunnels lengthened the bed rock pitched downward necessitating "inclines". Eventually they ran into underground water flow which was so great it could not be handled so mining in the deeper tunnels had to be abandoned. Throughout the tunnel work "pillars" of gravel were left at intervals to assist the timbers in keeping the surface from caving in. The majority of the work, "mucking", etc. was done by Chinese laborers. White men were also employed. In that era, unemployment was unknown.

Hydraulic mining began in the early 1860's throughout the area and millions of dollars in gold was recovered by this process. Virgin ground as well as that previously tunneled was hydrauliced with excellent returns. The pillars left in the "drifting" were heavily laden with gold. Only the front ground was hydrauliced due to the depth of the long tunnels.

Two miles northeast of Gibsonville on the Johnsville road, there is a beautiful man-made lake. The ground was first drifted, starting way down on Little Slate Creek. Later it was hydrauliced, using the tunnels as a sulice way. When hydraulicing ceased, Mr. George Cox, owner and operator, closed up the tunnels and allowed the pit to fill. It is fed from surface and underground streams. Its area is about three acres and was known as Cox's lake. Since, the name has been changed. Recently skin divers explored the lake and claim that there are depths of from forty to sixty feet in the middle of the lake.

There were, and still are, two streets in Gibsonville, one, the Main Street continues on through the town and on into the road leading to Mt. Pleasant, Whiskey Diggings and Johnsville. The other branched in the middle of town and finally was the road to Quincy.

On both sides of the street were homes. The commercial buildings were centered at the curve into the main street. All were painted and well-kept. Everyone owned his home and most of them were surrounded by beautiful yards of flowers and some had vegetable gardens. Many yards were enclosed with painted picket fences.

Supplies were laid in early in the fall for six months at least as the heavy snows closed the roads to larger storehouses. Supplies were first brought in by pack trains; later by horse-drawn vehicles. The first automobile came to Gibsonville around 1909.

Toward the north end of Main Street was a steep grade known as "Nigger Hill". At the top of this hill you turned slightly east onto a short street where Chinatown was located. This comprised several dwellings, a bunk house and a store. In passing by, it was not unusual to see Chinamen sitting on the porches smoking their opium pipes.

While hydraulic mining on a large scale east and south of Gibsonville, a cemetery was moved. The graves were dug up and the remains interred in the recent cemetery which is above the town just north of the Quincy road. Finally, when the ground was hydrauliced almost up to the back of the houses along Main Street, they had to quit. At that time the gravel was reported to be "rich". So it is a known fact that Main Street, which still remains, is resting on a real gold mine.

On the ridge dividing Gibsonville and Howland Flat was a sawmill which cut lumber and also timbers for the mine. It is still known as Saw Mill Ridge. The community supported two medical doctors. There was a school at Newark as well as at Gibsonville. Grades from beginners through 10th and on were taught. Many prepared for and passed the County Board Examination for teacher's certificates.

Long after large scale underground mining was discontinued, hydraulic mining also declined. When tailing began to settle on rich agricultural lands in the Sacramento Valley, the Debris Commission ordered restraining dams to be built. As a result all down Little Slate Creek high log dams were constructed. This helped prolong hydraulic mining. Gradually major operations ceased and ground-sluicing and "sniping" became the chief mining methods. Considerable gold was received from the tailings deposited from the tunnel and hydraulic operations.

In the early 1900's the remaining commercial buildings were two large hotels, the Wells Fargo Building, a general store with a stone wine cellar across the street and an underground cellar; one meat market, two livery stables, several barns, one saloon, and a brewery. By this time the Native Son's Hall had replaced the old red schoolhouse for class meetings. Even as late as 1905 there was an enrollment of nearly fifty pupils. The post office was in a private home but for several years before discontinuance it was housed in the General Merchandise store.

As mining waned people moved away. Homes were sold, torn down or moved elsewhere. The last two hotels and the store were torn down and the

materials are now part of the buildings at the Feather Forks Mine which is on the west side of Gibsonville Ridge on the south fork of the Feather River.

The town of Gibsonville experienced three or four short "boom" periods. In 1930 some capitalists from Stockton area leased the Taber Mine (formerly known as the Great Eastern) and undertook to open the old tunnel. After about three years, they quit due to lack of finances.

Then in 1934 a group of men from Oakland, California leased the Union-Keystone Mine and did considerable work cleaning and repairing the old tunnel. But due to disagreement among themselves, the lease was taken over in 1936 by a millionaire from San Francisco. He operated the mine successfully until 1941 when, due to ill health, he sold to a Fresno concern. Since then only maintenance and assessment work has been done. The San Francisco man installed modern equipment, including pumps with which he had no difficulty in handling the underground water flow. The tunnel was even wired for lights and also a phone. This mine has been idle for over fifty years.

During the depression years, in the 1930's, there were approximately twenty camps at Newark (Shiskey Diggings) and others elsewhere. These miners eked out a living from working the tailings.

The last real hydraulic mining was resumed off and on from 1936 thru 1942 when a portion of the Gibsonville townsite was mined. In order to carry on the operations a percentage per yard of dirt mined or washed, had to be paid to the P.G.&.E. for impounding the tailings behind Bullard's Bar dam. This work erased forever the famous Chinatown.

All of these enterprises brought new life to the community for a short time. In 1936 there were forty-seven registered voters there, which was three times as many as had voted in the fifteen or more years. Eventually just a few more people remained through the entire year until in the 1940's the town was inhabited only in the summer.

At present there are just six of the original buildings left. All are lopsided, weather worn and propped on both sides to help hold them from toppling over. One of the better homes of the early days which was owned by the storekeeper is braced inside with large timbers to keep it from being crushed with the heavy snow. The old Wells Fargo building is still there-- it has been a dwelling for many years.

However, in the past ten years four new cabins have been built. Two can be seen from the Quincy road on the east side and the other two are up in the forest northwest of the Quincy road, in the vicinity of the present cemetery.

Gibsonville, even with it's myriad of hydraulic pits, rock piles, waste dumps and weather-beaten awry houses, still is quite an attraction. It is picturesquely situated, being surrounded on the north and west by Gibsonville Ridge; on the east by towering Mt. Fillmore, Table Rock and Saw Mill Ridge; on the south by other distant ridges. The slopes of these ridges are covered by stately evergreens unscathed by forest fires. The air is very pure and the climate is cool, especially at night. Its elevation is 5,600 feet. Stoically every spring, four balm-of-gilead trees, two apple trees, one pear tree, yellow rose bushes, daffodils and bleeding heart plants burst forth in leaves and blooms in mute evidence of the beauty of by-gone days.

The claim owners are hoping for a raise in the price of gold, consistent with the spiralled wages and cost of equipment and materials. This, with modern machinery and improved mining methods should create a "come back" and bring the day when this "ghost town" will be an oblivion.

THE PRESS

Ref: History of Plumas, Lassen & Sierra Counties by Fariss & Smith pp 483-484. Publisher: Fariss & Smith, San Francisco, California, 1881

The Gibsonville Herald first made its appearance at Gibsonville in the winter of 1853-54, the exact date being impossible to obtain because of the destruction by fire of the earliest files. Heade, the editor, calling it the Gibsonville Herald & St. Louis News, which was delivered by special messenger in St. Louis. In the fall of 1855 the paper was sold and taken to LaPorte, where the title of Mountain Messenger was given it. In 1858 A. T. Dewey became proprietor, and the year following, William S. Byrnes became associated with him in its publication. Prior to 1860 the Messenger was a strong Whig organ consistently adopting Republican principles at that time, which it has advocated ever since. In the LaPorte fire of 1861 the office was totally destroyed by fire, but revived immediately. Dewey purchased Byrnes' interest in 1862, continuing the business alone until November, 1863, when J. A. Vaughn bought a half interest. In January, 1864, E. M. Dewey purchased the remaining half of A. T. Dewey, who retired from the newspaper, and in February it was removed to Downieville, and published there by Dewey & Vaughn for four years. In 1868 Mr. Dewey sold his interest to E. K. Downer and D. Whitney. Whitney soon severed his connection, and from that time to the present (1881) the Messenger has been under the control of Vaughn & Downer. It is an enterprising sheet, devoted to the interest of the county, enjoying a large patronage. The Messenger office occupies the three floors of a building on Durgan Flat owned by the editors and is well supplied with material for doing all kinds of country work. The ground on which the building stands is very rich in gold, which gives the Messenger an advantage not often had by newspapers, of having a solid basis upon which to do business.