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In The Vein

In the category of “Moving Ahead” —

Re-designed Website: In early October (maybe by the time you read this!) EMPA’s new website should be up and running! Give it a try at http://empiremine.org. It will be a “work in progress” for some time yet, so please be patient. Any comments will be appreciated! Just click on “Contact Us” and choose ‘Webmaster.” It’s that easy! (Note: if you happen to click on “Donations” by mistake, you can just complete that too – and we even have Pay Pal!) Thanks go to first-year Board Member Margi Nielsen and her crew for a job well done!

EMPA-Funded Projects Update: The “powering-up” of the 2-stamp, stamp mill in the mine yard has received full approval from Parks and final planning is in progress! One of our newest volunteers, Don Schmidt, recently retired as DPR Supervising Ranger, has been assigned to head up this project. (Welcome back, Don!) Assisting him will be Jim Ward, Tom Newmark, Bob Jennings, and any number of Over-the-Hill-Gang members. We will all be able to play “sidewalk superintendent” on this one!

The Cornish Pump project is also moving along, though at a much slower pace. Phase I, assembling the various pieces and cleaning/preserving them, is underway. This work is being done in a special spot just below the Compressor House, under the direction of Jim Dierberger and Jim Ward, with the able assistance of Tom Newmark and the ever-present OTHG. If you happen to go by to “supervise” this project, it is OK to feed them – donuts are preferred!

Reciprocal Visit: As many of you know, last month a contingent of Empire Mine docents toured the Bourn Mansion in San Francisco. Some also elected to go on a side trip, the following day, to the New Almaden Quicksilver Mine south of San Jose, where we learned how “our” mercury was mined. A very interesting experience!

Now it’s our turn to host a group of their docents as they travel up to Empire Mine for an enrichment training/field trip in mid-November. Their visit to Grass Valley will also include a side trip – a quick tour of the North Star House, to see where one of their early managers, A. D. Foote and his wife, Mary H. Foote, ended up. Small world, huh?!

Parks Personnel Change: Parks recently announced that Dan Youngren has been promoted to Supervising Ranger for the Sierra Gold Sector, replacing Don Schmidt. Congratulations Dan – we look forward to working with you!

See you around the Park – watching the OTHG hard at work!

Larry Skinner
My goal for this issue: to write a one-page summary of our trip to the Bourn Mansion in the City so that all our readers will come away with, at least, a hint of the flavor of the home. But, where/how do I start? And, more importantly, end?

Before addressing that task, however, I first need to give credit where it’s due: first of all, of course, to the present owners of this outstanding structure – Greg and Gloria McCandless – for opening their home to the fifty VIP’s and friends of EMSHP! And secondly, but still very important, to Jack and Peg Laird for their super organization of this trip. I assure you, without Jack’s perseverance for the last three or four years, this would not have happened!!! Please tell him “thanks” when you see him next!

And now to the home itself at 2550 Webster Street: this fortress-like building takes up almost all of the lot that Wm. B. Bourn II purchased sometime in the 1890’s. The home was designed by Willis Polk – a well-known and very influential architect of his time. Usually termed as a “Georgian-Baroque” style, Polk used clinker brick to add a rustic arts and craft character to the home. By the way, Polk left his initials in three places on the building – two of them before you even open the front door! If you’re observant, you’ll also notice a curious detail before you even enter the house – there’s no door knob on the outside of the highly ornamented double doors! It sort of adds to the “fortress” feeling of the house.

It’s more than double the size, at approximately 10,000 sq. ft., of the Empire Cottage and definitely has a more formal feeling – from the first floor, sometimes referred to as the “basement,” to the top floor which is known as the 4th or “attic floor.”

A visitor is impressed immediately upon entering as the relatively dark entry hall features an arched, gilded ceiling – rumor says that it was designed like this to resemble the shaft of a gold mine (look left)! And, in the near distance, the grand staircase is evident – which rises to all three levels above. Bruce Porter was responsible for the design of the gorgeous stained glass windows on the landing of each floor – one of which is still undergoing restoration. This floor houses the reception room for their guests, a den (or possibly a second reception room), wine cellar, a servants’ room and laundry area, the furnace room, the service stairway, and the kitchen. This room has been upgraded with modern appliances and an island addition, but has retained much of its original character including the layout and cabinetry. It features a dumbwaiter that transports items up to the dining room’s butler’s pantry on the floor above.

What is called the “principal floor,” is the next floor up; from the grand staircase, you enter into the “stair foyer,” a large area that features a wall-to-wall Bruce Porter mural of a landscape that also includes several figures. There is another “reception room” nearby – for those visitors who make it that far! – that took a great deal of work to restore since it suffered extensive water damage. It features an ornate ceiling with more gilding and has rich redwood paneled walls.
In the front of this floor there is a grand scaled drawing or living room that has also been called the ballroom. The woven hemp ceiling has already been restored and the wall fabrics will be replaced in-kind to the existing linen. The dining room is a handsome space with tall, coffered ceilings and beautifully detailed mahogany walls and casings. The Conservatory (right) completes this floor with large, leaded glass windows (completely remade), marble floor, and redwood trim. This area also suffered massive water damage. The McCandless family added a kitchenette where a storage closet originally was located.

Ascending the second flight of stairs, we found ourselves in the Bourn family’s personal domain. The large bedroom at the rear is called the “Guest Bedroom,” but those of us on the trip wondered if that might have been Maud’s bedroom. The “Principal Chamber” (what we might now call the “master suite”) is located in the front portion of this third floor and consists of a spacious bed chamber as well as an adjoining sitting room. With lots of natural light streaming in, these rooms are “light and bright.” The bathroom is off the bedroom and is quite large and was remodeled in the 1920’s. It originally featured a claw foot tub and oak flooring, while since the 20’s, it boasts a shower and marble wainscoting.

And – on the top or the “attic floor,” we found three smallish servants’ rooms, a room for the storage of linens as well as a sewing room. Interestingly, these two areas, as well as others, contain multiple built-in drawers made of oak that are almost identical to those found in the upstairs of the Empire Cottage which was built a short time later. In the front or “street side” of this fourth floor, there are two adjacent rooms called the “Chamber,” or guest room – it has cedar casings and molding. There’s a possibility that this could have been the butler’s room; if so, he would have been very highly regarded to be assigned these quarters! The adjacent room is called the “Redwood Room” and thought to be a sitting room although many of us have read that this very masculine, rustic room served as Bourn’s den.

Incidentally, some of you might be wondering who the gentleman is that I’ve referenced twice in this article. Bruce Porter was a talented painter, sculptor, muralist, and landscape designer who designed the beautiful stained glass windows in the Bourn’s San Francisco home and later was enlisted to help the Bourns plan the layout of the extensive formal gardens at their Filoli home.

One of our VIPs along that day, Betty Lucas, is presently in the midst of collecting and editing the pictures that several of us took that day – attempting to choose the best shots of each area. This is a very big project so it’s too soon to promise anything, but I’m hoping that somehow these photos might be available to interested parties to view one day. In the meantime, you can enjoy the few that I’m including in this issue of the Empire Star. And that reminds me – I have some other folks to thank for making “their” space in the newsletter available for my use this month so that I can use more than my usual one page! You may have noticed that as I started this article, I intended to keep it at one page, but very soon it became evident that a one-page article was an impossibility – so here I am ending my second full page! I sincerely hope you’ve enjoyed my story!
A Glimpse from the Past
Barbara Jarvis, Research Coordinator

Taken from the Nevada City Nugget, 10 Mar 1928 pg 1 col 1

Curious Relic Is Dug Up by the Nugget

A rust covered, round nosed steel projectile, 3 1/2 inches in length, 2 1/2 inches caliber and weighing 3 1/2 pounds, was taken from the Idaho mine in clearing out the old 400 level in 1919, and loaned to the Nugget to put in their window. A number of these were found in the debris at that time and those engaged in the work were puzzled as to how such warlike material could happen to be reposing 400 feet below the surface. C.A. Brockington was asked if he knew anything about underground artillery. He informed us that he had seen the gun and knew about their being used, but personally had never fired anything larger than a 44, although he still takes a shot whenever the occasion demands. He referred us to Mr. Thomas Plummer, who actually worked at the Idaho when these guns were in use. From Mr. Plummer, we learned the reason for this unique method of freeing the chutes of clogged, broken ore. It was learned that a lot of soft-rock miners used to bombard the underground stopes with cannon and steel projectiles.

The Idaho vein, as we all know, is almost vertical and the serpentine footwall had a most annoying habit of swelling badly when exposed to the air in this way often flocking the free running of the loose ore in the chutes, which ran from level to level. It would have been extremely hazardous for anyone to climb up these steep chutes to attempt to free or remove any obstruction, so these cannons, which were about four feet in length and weighed in the neighborhood of 250 pounds were brought into play. They were charged with black powder, the projectile was rammed home, the gun trained on the offending obstruction and fired by means of a timed fuse.

These guns were in use at both the Idaho and the Eureka mines from about 1872 to 1879 on the 700 level and above. As these were the only steep veins being worked in the district at that time, that is the reason that cannons were not generally used. Cars were not loaded from chutes as they are at present, but the ore issued from the chutes onto platforms called sollars, from which it was shoveled into the cars.

The Race Against Development

By Lise Hinman, Oral History Coordinator

The Founding of the Empire Mine State Historic Park

As docents, we understand the vital role the Empire Mine played in the rush for California gold. The men who owned and managed this mine contributed not only to the mining industry, but invested in the infrastructure, which continues to serve this state. We would agree that the Empire Mine should be preserved for future generations. However, the story of the Empire Mine could have crumbled and rusted away without the foresight of some key people. One of the vital players was Virginia Brunini, a presently-serving EMPA Board member.

In early August, Virginia sat down with me to record her story. A copy of this Oral History can be found in the Visitors’ Center. It is with the other Oral Histories, in drawers on the far right (as you’re standing behind the counter) of the first display case. The transcription will be ready at a future date – say before the next lunar eclipse, at the rate I translate! In the meantime, take advantage of the opportunity to hear how Virginia Brunini stepped forward to see that the Empire Mine was not lost to development.
Miners Picnic “Search for the Gold” Results
By Jack Laird

Ninety-seven completed forms were turned in to compete for this year’s prize package. Eleven of those failed to state which city they came from, but that still left 86 from which to collect the data that tells us where our visitors live.

It makes sense that Grass Valley and Nevada City would top the list, but it is interesting to see the diversity of the other locations. Is it due to our publicity or is it that these folks just happened to be visiting our area when they found out about the Picnic?

We can also surmise that several members of the same family played the game and turned in their forms. Something else that is interesting is that when you look at the writing on the entries, it becomes evident that most of the people who participated were children.

Following is a list created from the entries of those who indicated their home town:

- Grass Valley: 30
- Nevada City: 9
- Marysville and Sacramento: 6 each
- Lincoln: 4
- Roseville, Garden Grove, Penn Valley and Auburn: 3 each
- Yuba City, Loomis, Wheatland and Colusa: 2 each
- Castro Valley, Granite Bay, Antioch, Concord, Rocklin, Sparks (NV), Camptonville, Meadow Vista, Portola Valley, San Francisco and Walesa (GA): 1 each

DATES TO REMEMBER

Thursday, October 2
First VIP Tour: Hard Rock Mining Center
3 – 4:30 p.m.
(for those VIPs who are signed up to attend)

Thursday, October 16
Coordinator Meeting
10:00 a.m. in the Docent Building

Tuesday, October 21
EMPA Board of Directors Meeting
9:30 a.m. in the Docent Building

Thursday, November 6
Annual EMPA General Meeting
1 p.m. in the Docent Building

My father had spent about a year in Chicago. He had been sent there by the British Ministry. He loved Chicago. Any time we came to the U.S. we had to stop in Chicago because he had so many friends there.

The year after my mother died he went back to Ireland where he was appointed to the senate to take the place of a senator who had died. In 1931 he was elected to the senate for 9 years.

My grandfather was trying to get rid of everything before he died so he and my father got together and decided to donate Muckross as a national park. It was handed over in 1933.

After that my father remarried and went to live in France where he stayed until WWII started. He got out of there and went to Gibraltar, then to Ireland where he stayed while the war was on.

He died in 1956. He was a director of Empire and Spring Valley Water Company but gave that up when he wanted to go back to Ireland.


Miners worked two shifts, six days a week. The day shift was from 7:00 to 3:00. The night shift was from 3:30 to 11:00. The shifts changed every week.

There is no industry with as many safety laws as mining. Your work place was only as safe as you made it. They called it good housekeeping.

The day shift would go down, start mucking and start drilling for the night shift. There was no difference in wages between the two shifts.

The preceding recollections are believed to be true; however, we are relying on the memory of the individual who had such a recollection.
TAKE NOTICE!

EMPA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1:00 p.m.
November 6, 2014
Docent Building at EMSHP

Please join us at EMPA’s Annual Meeting. You are invited to share your ideas and concerns with your EMPA Board of Directors as we move forward into 2015.

Since there are only two applicants for the four openings on the 2015 EMPA Board (as I write this on September 29) there is no need to hold an election this year.

The two people who have submitted their application are:

Mark S. Allen brings 40 years of experience studying gold mining and geology. Mark is retired from owning his Honda repair shop in Sacramento after over 30 years in that business. Mark has past board experience involved with American River College organizations and he currently serves on the Sierra Nevada Mining Industry Council. Mark is a docent at Empire and does a great job playing George Starr in the Cottage – among many areas in which he is active. We welcome Mark to the Board as he brings his youthful energy and his love of the EMSHP to the table.

Sean Gilleran, a current Board member whose term is ending, intends to serve for another term.

We’re very fortunate to announce that Phil Oyung is scheduled to speak at the meeting – to tell stories and answer questions about living at the Empire Mine as a member of the Oyung family. Phil helped his father, George Sing Oyung, as gardener and grounds keeper at the Mine until the State took control. I know that Phil has many interesting memories to share with us. (I’d like to know how his family handled the Stamp Mill noise and how he survived swimming in the Cyanide pond.) Let’s find out!

Jim Coe, EMPA Vice President
Empire Mine State Park
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www.empiremine.org
THE EMPIRE STAR

This Newsletter is a Cooperative venture between the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Empire Mine Park Association.

On the web at www.empiremine.org