Historical and Recreation Map of PLACERVILLE... ...HANGTOWN AND Western El Dorado County CALIFORNIA

The HANGTOWN story

The story of old Hangtown really begins at Coloma, where James Marshall built a sawmill on the south fork of the American River for his employer, John Sutter. On January 24, 1848, Marshall discovered flecks of gold in the tailrace of the mill, and when the news spread the great Gold Rush began.

Up ravines and over hills scrambled miners and merchants, soldiers and seamen. By the summer of '48 more than a thousand men were working the ground at a new camp, which soon replaced Coloma as the initial rendezvous for the Argonauts. It was called Dry Diggings, because the miners had to cart the dry soil down to running water to wash out the gold.

But not all the newcomers were interested in gathering their share of the plentiful wealth by such back-breaking labor. Murders and robberies had become frequent in isolated camps along the banks of the American River, and before long several merchants and miners in Dry Diggings had lost their poke of gold dust at knife point.

So early in 1849, after one such crime, an impromptu citizens' jury met to consider the fate of the three accused. The jury wasted little time reaching a verdict. When the question was asked, "What shall be done with them?", someone shouted, "Hang them!" The majority were in agreement. And so it was that the first known hanging in the Mother Lode was carried out. The site was a giant white oak in the corner of Elstner's Hay Yard near the center of the town. The word spread quickly and Old Dry Diggings became commonly known as Hangtown.

By 1854 Hangtown had become the third largest town in California, surpassed only by San Francisco and Sacramento. (Los Angeles was in 15th place with a mere 541 voters.) With the increasing population had come a temperance league, a Methodist Episcopal church, and agitation for a less morbid name. Placerville had been suggested as early as 1850. It became official when the city was incorporated in 1854.

That same year an election was held to try to wrest the county seat of government away from Coloma. But Placerville was not the only competitor. Three other communities joined in the running. Among the rivals none could muster enough votes to upset Coloma.

Two years later Placerville tried again and this time the contest was limited to just the two towns. Again, the official vote showed Coloma the victor, but a group of indignant Placerville citizens called a meeting to air their suspicions of ballot-box stuffing and election fraud. Apparently the evidence supporting the charges was sufficient to convince the State Legislature to settle the matter, once and for all. So, by an act of the legislature, the county seat was moved to Placerville in 1857.

As local mining declined Placerville gained new life from the Comstock silver strike in Nevada. Throughout the '50's Placerville had been the western terminus for the Overland Trail. The year 1859 saw the beginning of a massive reverse migration. From 1859 to 1866, the Placerville-Carson Road (now U.S. Highway 50) witnessed the greatest era of freighting and staging by horse-drawn vehicles ever known.

Today Placerville remains the hub of the Mother Lode country. The industry has turned from mining to lumber, agriculture, light manufacturing, tourism, and recreation. Placerville is the service area for 35,000 people and remains the location of the offices of the El Dorado County government. But world over, when the city and its rich history are recalled, it is the colorful name of Hangtown which has endured.

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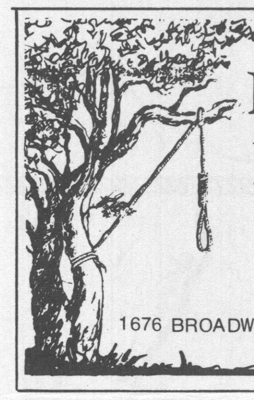

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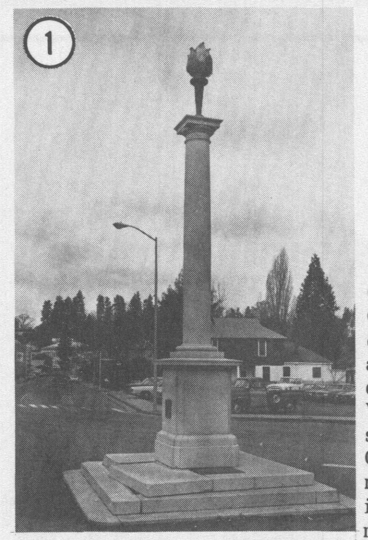
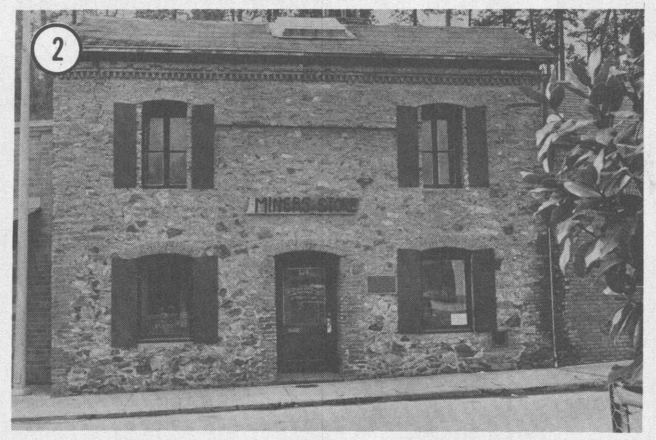


Druid Monument - A memorial to Frederick Sieg, born in Saxony in 1815, and pioneer Placerville resident, who founded the first Druids' Grove in California here in 1859. The Druid Order aided the miners as a mutual help organization in those rough and tumble early days.

Combellack House, 3059 Cedar Ravine - the tower, ornately turned balustrades, and the stained glass windows make this magnificent Victorian mansion a favorite subject for artists. William Combellack, a Placerville merchant, built the house in 1896 and his five children were raised there.



Nuss Building - Built in the early 1850's, one of the few survivors of the disastrous fire in 1856. At that time it housed John Fountain's soda bottling plant. The stone building is named for George Nuss, who along with a partner, purchased it in 1863.

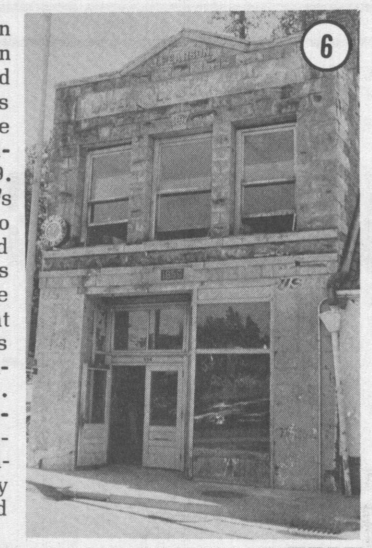
JIM MAZZUCHI

El Dorado County Historical Museum - Located at the county fairgrounds, houses a large collection of historical relics and antiques with the emphasis on local history. A permanent display features the furnishings and appointments of a well-to-do Victorian household.

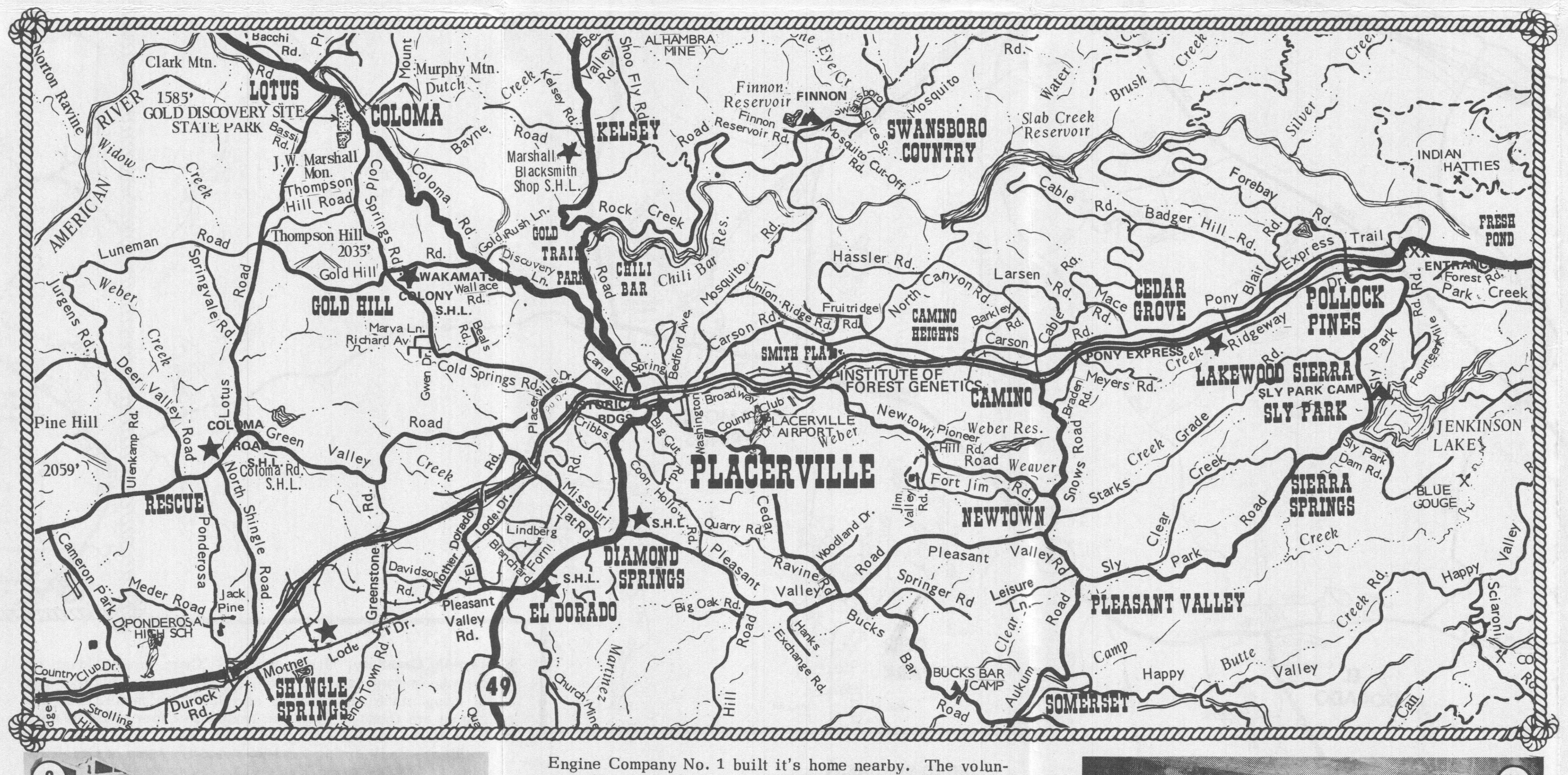
Stone House - Built about 1865 of hand-hewn rock, Stone House is the only surviving structure of Placerville's Chinatown. Outwardly it was the place of business for a Chinese herbalist. But inside there was opium and gambling and upstairs a well-patronized bordello. A mine tunnel, now caved in, connects with the back of the building. Perhaps this was used by customers who did not want to be seen entering through the front door. The building was restored recently and now houses offices.

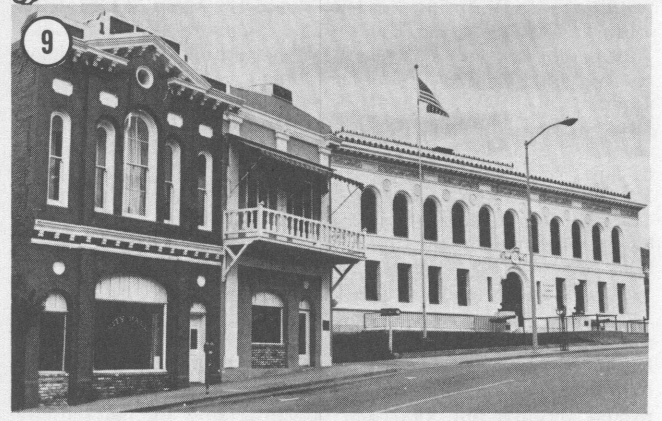
Methodist Episcopal Church - The first regular Methodist service in Placerville was held in a tent in the spring of 1850. Later that year a Methodist Episcopal Church was organized, it being the second church in the Mother Lode. The church was built at the corner of Main and Cedar Ravine and dedicated in 1851. The lumber for the frame structure was shipped around the Horn. Services were held in it until 1861 when a larger, brick church was built beside it. It now stands, reconstructed on a site near the present Federated Church.

Pearson Soda Works - John McFarland Pearson began manufacturing carbonated water and flavoring syrups in Placerville in 1852. The lower portion of the building was constructed in 1859. After inheriting their father's business, Pearson's two sons added the second story in 1897 to be used as a bottling room. In the early days, ice was brought down from the mountains and kept in a 150-foot tunnel behind the building. Later Pearson added ice-making equipment and manufactured ice became available along with local dairy products, fine wines, and liquors.



Fausel House - This lovely brick home was built in 1861 by a Placerville brewer, F. Giebenhain. The brewery, renowned for producing "the finest steam beer in the state", was located adjacent to the house.

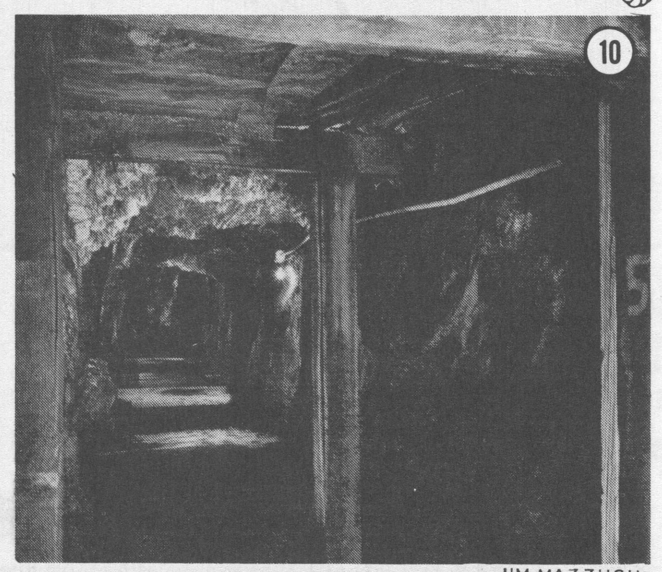




El Dorado County Courthouse and City Hall buildings - the northwest corner of Main and Bedford has been the site of the county's offices since 1859. The present courthouse, which now houses only the courts and the county clerk's offices, was completed in 1912. In 1860, Confidence Engine Company No. 1 built it's home nearby. The volunteer firemen had organized in 1857 as the Mountaineer Engine Co., but an engine purchased from Sacramento bore the name "Confidence" so deeply engraved that it could not be removed, so the members agreed to adopt that name. The building now houses the City Hall.

Gold Bug Mine - The Gold Bug Mine in Bedford Park is the only municipally owned, open to the public, gold mine in the world. It was developed by two tunnels. Both are fully illuminated. The park also features a restored stamp mill, picnic areas, barbecues, and a hiking trail.

PHOTOGRAPHS - Dick Stanfield
(unless otherwise noted)
HISTORY & BACKGROUND (rev.) - Betty Shannon
El Dorado County Historical Society



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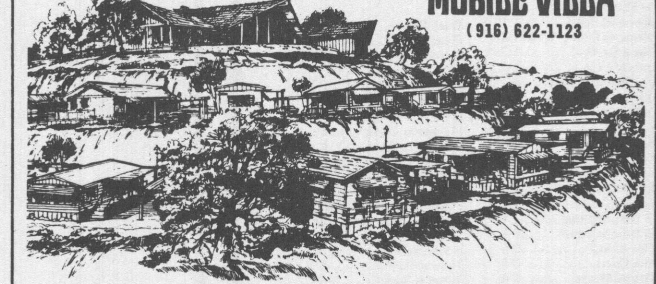

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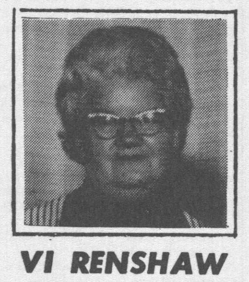

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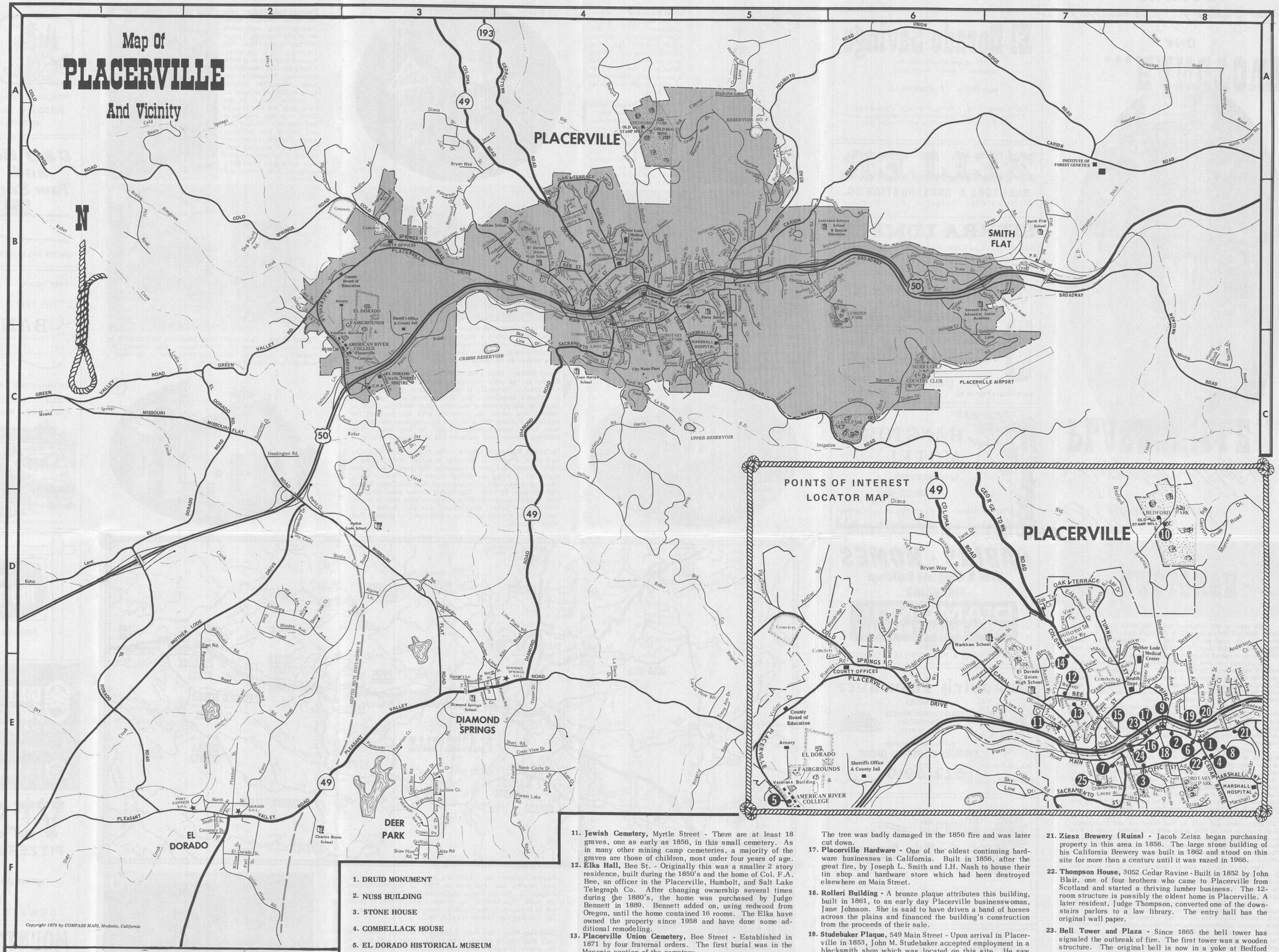
Map Of PLACERVILLE And Vicinity



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Map and Brochure Courtesy of
HANGTOWN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
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2. NUSS BUILDING
3. STONE HOUSE
4. COMBELLACK HOUSE
5. EL DORADO HISTORICAL MUSEUM
6. PEARSON SODA WORKS
7. FAUSEL HOUSE
8. METHODIST-EPISCOPAL CHURCH
9. CITY HALL & COUNTY COURTHOUSE
10. GOLD BUG MINE

(see over for pictures and text)

11. **Jewish Cemetery,** Myrtle Street - There are at least 18 graves, one as early as 1856, in this small cemetery. As in many other mining camp cemeteries, a majority of the graves are those of children, most under four years of age.
12. **Elks Hall,** Bee St. - Originally this was a smaller 2 story residence, built during the 1850's and the home of Col. F.A. Bee, an officer in the Placerville, Humbolt, and Salt Lake Telegraph Co. After changing ownership several times during the 1880's, the home was purchased by Judge Bennett in 1889. Bennett added on, using redwood from Oregon, until the home contained 16 rooms. The Elks have owned the property since 1958 and have done some additional remodeling.
13. **Placerville Union Cemetery,** Bee Street - Established in 1871 by four fraternal orders. The first burial was in the Masonic section of the cemetery.
14. **Nick Fox House,** Coloma St. - Built in 1887 by Nick Fox, a local saloon keeper. The fireplace in the entry hall is faced with natural rock interspersed with crystals, obsidian, and fossils. The hearth is laid with polished creek pebbles.
15. **Episcopal Church -** Built in 1865 at a cost of $10,500, the church still serves its parishioners. Much of the money was raised through festivals and concerts held by the ladies' guild.
16. **Hangman's Tree (site) -** In the corner of Elstner's Hay Yard stood a giant oak which served as a natural gallows for the triple lynching in 1849. Because of this and subsequent hangings, the town became known far and wide as Hangtown. The tree was badly damaged in the 1856 fire and was later cut down.
17. **Placerville Hardware -** One of the oldest continuing hardware businesses in California. Built in 1856, after the great fire, by Joseph L. Smith and I.H. Nash to house their tin shop and hardware store which had been destroyed elsewhere on Main Street.
18. **Rolleri Building -** A bronze plaque attributes this building, built in 1861, to an early day Placerville businesswoman, Jane Johnson. She is said to have driven a band of horses across the plains and financed the building's construction from the proceeds of their sale.
19. **Studebaker Plaque,** 549 Main Street - Upon arrival in Placerville in 1853, John M. Studebaker accepted employment in a blacksmith shop which was located on this site. He saw the need of the miners for good wheelbarrows and began manufacturing them in the rear of the shop. Studebaker's wheelbarrows were the best made. By 1858 he had accumulated savings of $8000 with which he returned to South Bend, Indiana, where he joined his brothers in founding the Studebaker Wagon Company, forerunner of the Studebaker automobile corporation.
20. **James Blair House,** Clay St. - Built by James Blair, a son of one of the four pioneer Blair brothers, in 1902, for his bride. Although sugar pine was used extensively in the construction, the home's total cost in those bygone, pre-inflation days was only $2,500.
21. **Ziesz Brewery (Ruins) -** Jacob Zeisz began purchasing property in this area in 1856. The large stone building of his California Brewery was built in 1862 and stood on this site for more than a century until it was razed in 1966.
22. **Thompson House,** 3052 Cedar Ravine - Built in 1852 by John Blair, one of four brothers who came to Placerville from Scotland and started a thriving lumber business. The 12-room structure is possibly the oldest home in Placerville. A later resident, Judge Thompson, converted one of the downstairs parlors to a law library. The entry hall has the original wall paper.
23. **Bell Tower and Plaza -** Since 1865 the bell tower has signaled the outbreak of fire. The first tower was a wooden structure. The original bell is now in a yoke at Bedford and Main Streets.
24. **300 Main Street (Raffles Hotel) -** A hotel has stood on this site since 1849. First it was Elstner's El Dorado Hotel, destroyed in the fire of 1856. The three-story Cary House opened in September, 1857. It was the center of activity for many years. The Hotel Placerville replaced the Cary House in 1915. It was remodelled and the name changed to the Raffles in 1926.
25. **Placerville City Cemetery,** Chamberlain Street - In the spring, buttercups and other wildflowers bloom amidst the old marble grave markers, many of which date back to the 1850's.

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COMING EVENTS — JULY 1975 - JUNE 1976

JUNE

27, 28 - SHINGLE SPRINGS JUBILEE. Shingle Springs - Horse show, queen contest, parade.

JULY - 1975

4 - OLD FASHIONED JULY 4TH CELEBRATION. Garden Valley. Contests, races, games.

5 & 6 - PONY EXPRESS RERUN. Pollock Pines. Horseback riders, re-enact Pony Express run. Parade, contests, barbecue, special mail delivery.

14 thru 20 - HWY 50 WAGON TRAIN DAYS. Wagon Train follows Hwy 50 from Round Hill, Nevada to Placerville.

17 thru 20 - GOLD DISCOVERY FAIR. Placerville. Old-time county fair at fairgrounds west of town. Wagon Train arrives here July 18; Studebaker Wheelbarrow Races, Queen Contest, Horse Show, exhibits, entertainment, etc.

24 thru 27 - JEEPERS JAMBOREE. Georgetown.

AUGUST - 1975

22, 23, 24 - 2ND ANNUAL MOTHER LODE ANTIQUE SHOW. Placerville, County Fair grounds - Main exhibit building. Antiques and collectibles. Admission fee: $1.25 per person.

SEPTEMBER - 1975

1 - ANNUAL LABOR DAY COUNTRY BAZAAR. Diamond Springs. Pancake Breakfast, bazaar with antiques & collectibles.

OCTOBER - 1975

October thru December - **HARVEST TIME FESTIVAL.** Camino, Apple Hill orchards sell fresh apples, cider, apple desserts.

Last weekend - **DOWNTOWN CHRISTMAS EXTRAVAGANZA & PARADE.** Placerville Santa comes to town.

Last weekend thru holidays - **CHRISTMAS TREE LANE.** Placerville. Christmas trees line Hwy 50 with colored lights during the holidays.

DECEMBER - 1975

Until Christmas - **ANNUAL CHOOSE & CUT CHRISTMAS TREE SEASON.** El Dorado County. Tree farms open for "choose and cut your own" Christmas tree season.

JANUARY - 1976

22, 23, 24, 25 - GOLD DISCOVERY DAYS Coloma. Bicentennial edition of yearly gold discovery celebration. Firemen's parade, dance, melodrama on Sat. Gold Discovery Parade, Fiddler's Contest on Sunday.

APRIL - 1976

All month - **APPLE BLOSSOM TIME.** Orchards at Apple Hill, around Coloma and Placerville in full bloom.

MAY - 1976

Early May - **FIREMEN'S FIELD DAY.** Placerville. Lions Park. Contests, parade and picnic.

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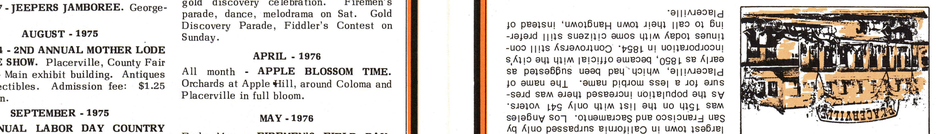
PLACERVILLE past and present

The Old Hangtown story began with the gold rush when more than a thousand men converged on a new camp which they called Dry Diggings, because the miners had to cart the dry soil to running water to wash out the gold.

Murders and robberies had become so frequent that after one such crime, an impromptu citizens jury met to determine the fate of the three accused men. The question was asked, "What shall be done with them,"? "Hang them!" someone shouted. The majority agreed. And that was how the first known hanging in the Mother Lode took place. The hanging tree was a giant White oak in the corner of Elsners Hay Yard near the center of town. As word spread of this incident, Dry Diggings became commonly known as Hangtown.



By 1854, Hangtown had become the third largest town in California surpassed only by San Francisco and Sacramento. Los Angeles was 5th on the list with only 341 voters. As the population increased there was pressure for a less morbid name. The name of Placerville, which had been suggested as early as 1850, became official with the city's incorporation in 1854. Controversy still continues today with some citizens still preferring to call their town Hangtown, instead of Placerville.

After two hotly contested elections between 1854 and 1857 to move the county government from the town of Coloma to Placerville, Placerville succeeded in securing the county seat by an act of Legislature in 1857. When local mining declined, Placerville again boomed with the Comstock silver strike in Nevada. In the 1850's Placerville had been the western terminus for the eastern migration from the Overland Trail. 1859 saw the beginning of a reverse migration from west to east. From 1859 to 1866 the Placerville-Carson road (now Highway 50) had the greatest era of freighting & staging by horse drawn vehicles ever known.

Placerville today is still the hub of the Mother Lode County. Industry has moved from mining to lumber, agriculture, light manufacturing, tourism and recreation. It is the service area for 35,000 people and still the seat of county government. Its businesses offer a wide variety of goods and services, and the merchants have gained the reputation of being downright old-fashioned when it comes to friendliness and good service.

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MAPS AVAILABLE AT ADVERTISERS LISTED INSIDE

- City, State, County Bldgs.
- Professional Services
- Schools
- Food & Lodging
- Historical Sights
- Parks & Recreation

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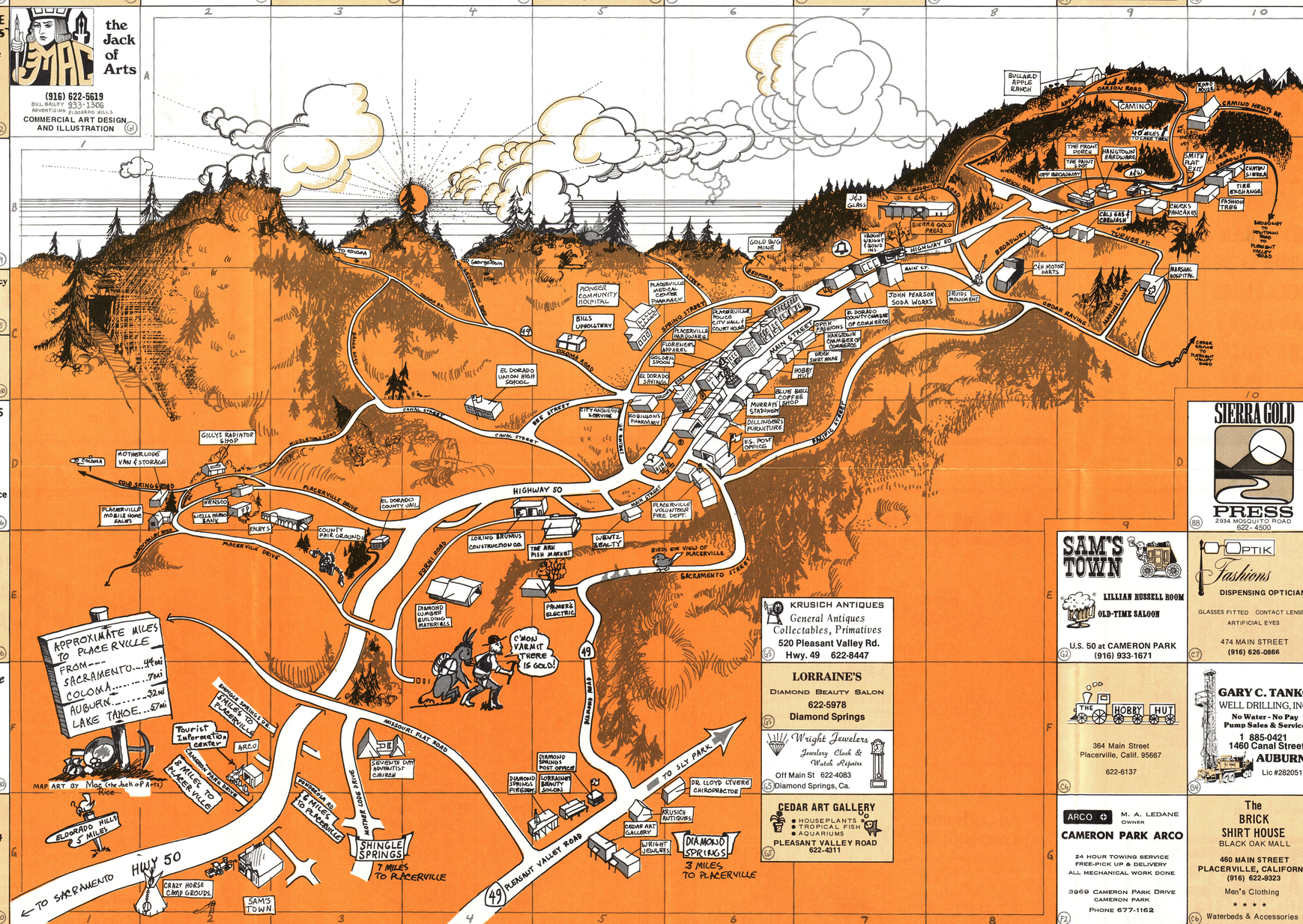
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