

Appendix 2-2: Brief History of Ramelli Ranch Vicinity

Brief History of the Ramelli Ranch Vicinity Sierra Valley, CA

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Brief History of the Ramelli Ranch Vicinity

The Northern Sierra Nevada Mountains contain the physical evidence of a rich and complex Native American history reaching back thousands of years. These landscapes are rooted deeply in tribal memory. The mountain valleys were central places from which long used trails radiated out following the ridgetops and the many water courses. The benches and terraces above the valleys were places where large encampments were established and maintained season after season. Sierra Valley presented an expansive base for settlement and held an array of valuable resources. The low elevation pass at the northeast end was a gateway for Great Basin populations to enter the mountains while the northwest arm of Sierra Valley and the outlet of the Middle Fork of the Feather River (Middle Fork) provided a natural pathway east from Northern Sierra Nevada.

Archaeological sites in this same vicinity show evidence of human occupation from as early as 5,500 years ago (Waechter and Andolina 2004). As climate and ecosystems fluctuated from warmer and wetter to colder and drier conditions, Sierra Valley was continuously used for seasonal forays and settlement. Artifacts and cooking features present at multiple ancient campsites documented in the area suggests a strong emphasis on the processing and export of bulbs, roots and seeds. Hunting of the abundant waterfowl within the marsh-like lowlands, and rabbits and deer on the drier valley bottom and surrounding hills was also very important.

The Washoe to the east and the Mountain Maidu (or Northeastern Maidu) to the north and west met within Sierra Valley for uncounted generations (D'Azevedo 1986:467, 471; Riddell 1978:370-386). These tribes had different cultural backgrounds and very different languages. The pre-contact Washoe were a Great Basin tribe. Sierra Valley was at the northeastern edge of a large traditional territory that encompassed much of today's Western Nevada. They gathered a variety of roots, bulbs and grasses from the valley but there was reportedly a particularly prized grass found here that they called *múćim* which was also the name they applied to the valley itself (ibid:474). The Washoe obtained resources through trade or access into Mountain Maidu territory (e.g., acorns and salmon).

The pre-contact Mountain Maidu were adept at life in the Northern Sierra Nevada Mountains (Riddell 1978:370-386). Central to them was the upper reaches of the Middle Fork and the North Fork of the Feather River including the fall salmon runs. A strong Mountain Maidu presence in Northwestern Sierra Valley is evident in the archaeological resources recorded in this vicinity. The Mountain Maidu also benefited in trade coming from the east obtaining resources not readily available in their traditional territory (e.g., obsidian).

All of this was massively disrupted in the middle of the nineteenth century with Euro-American contact. While there are no known accounts confirming entry into Sierra Valley, early trappers were reportedly working along the Truckee River in the early 1830s (D'Azevedo 1986:493). The pioneer ranches that began to be developed in the mid-1850s spelled the end of traditional lifeways of the Mountain Maidu and the Washoe within Sierra Valley. By the 1860s, large portions of the valley bottom were being drained and put under cultivation. Yet at least some of the mountain camps were still used by surviving families and groups. As late as November 1867 the *Mountain Messenger* noted that the tribes had once again engaged in their annual practice of fall burning in the hills surrounding Sierra Valley (2 November 1867 in Sinnott 1982:70). Burning was routinely undertaken season after season but this period certainly marked the end of the annual cycle. The remaining Native American population could no longer gain access to manage the ecosystem at a landscape level.

In 1850 James P. “Jim” Beckwourth entered Sierra Valley and recognized the advantage of the low elevation pass at the northeast end (Wilson 1972; **Figure 1 and 2**). He blazed a trail beginning at what is today Sparks, Nevada crossing the pass then continuing along the north end of Sierra Valley then through Grizzly Valley and American Valley to finally reach the settlement of Bidwell’s Bar; now below the waters of Oroville Reservoir. Between 1851 and 1854 some 1,200 emigrants used the trail leading 12,000 head of cattle, 700 sheep, and 500 horses into Northern California (Young 2003:59). While most emigrants continued on, being eager to realize the promise of gold, a hardy few remained behind to establish the first ranches and homesteads in Sierra Valley.



Figure 1. James P. Beckwourth.

Figure 2. Beckwourth Pass looking east ca. 1910. The railroad at left is the SierraValleys RR discussed below. (Both photos - Plumas County Museum)

Of African-American descent, Jim Beckwourth was a trapper, scout, trader, explorer and all around entrepreneur. He was also, by all accounts, a gifted story teller. He personally led the first emigrant wagon trains over the pass and along his new trail in August of 1851 (Wilson 1972:135). Beckwourth established a trading post at the northwestern end of Sierra Valley where his cabin would be the first constructed house emigrants would see since the Utah territory. Here, at what he named the War Horse Ranch, he would meet the weary emigrants and here they would pause before the final leg of their long westward journey (**Figure 3**). He reportedly lost his first two cabins in rapid succession due to conflicts with the local Native Americans but reconstructed a new one each time (Fariss and Smith 1971 [1882]:260).



Figure 3.

Log cabin associated with Beckwourth's Ranch labeled here as the "Old Beckwourth Hotel at Willow Glen, Plumas County 1849-1910." There has been some professional debate regarding the historical validity of this log cabin as truly being associated with Jim Beckwourth (it certainly was not present in 1849). The cabin survives today and is used as the Beckwourth Museum along Rocky Point Road. (Plumas County Museum).

It is reported that something of a colony grew up at the ranch with "...fields of fine vegetables, a herd of about two hundred sheep, a hundred ponies and immense flocks of domestic fowls." (Wilson 1972:158-159). Beckwourth remained for several years journeying about the countryside on various errands while maintaining his trading post but he did not realize the profits he anticipated. His insatiable wanderlust along with conflicts with the growing number of ranchers in the area led to his departure from Sierra Valley. At what point he actually gave up his place is unclear but by the end of 1858 he had left California for good (1972:160).

By the mid-1860s, several ranches were well established along the northwestern end of Sierra Valley including the Abraham Ede Ranch by ca. 1860, the George Mapes Ranch in 1863, and Peter Parish who was present by early 1860s in the area that would later include the town of Beckwith/Beckwourth (Fariss and Smith 1971 [1882]). By 1867 Beckwourth's old ranch was owned by Alexander Kerby (sometimes recorded as the common spelling of Kirby) (Elliott and Kliejunas 2006:5). His two-story ranch house on the hill overlooking the Middle Fork was reportedly constructed in the 1860s (**Figure 4**; Plumas County Historical Society [PCHS] 1985:57). In 1870 John Ross established a ranch in a narrow arm of the valley southeast of the Kerby Ranch that still retains the name Ross Meadow (Elliott 2004). By 1872 the small valley just north of Kerby's, the Grizzly Creek arm, was under the ownership of David T. Jones (Lawson 2021). The lower end of Jones' land holdings along the creek became known locally as Willow Glen.

In the early years Sierra Valley ranchers provided hay, butter, and beef to the mining communities in Sierra County including Downieville (Sinnott 1982). Products, including large quantities of hay, were delivered over high country trails by mule trains. In the 1860s the Nevada Comstock was on the rise and demand for all types of consumer products was very high. Dairy products brought a high return if they could reach the Nevada markets. Sierra Valley ranchers and farmers responded and profited accordingly. Also beginning in the mid-1860s, the higher elevation meadows and valleys (e.g. Red Clover Valley) began to be used for dairy, hay production, and summer range.



Figure 4.

Alex Kerby's house located directly along the Quincy-Reno Wagon Road on the old Beckwourth Ranch. This house survives today and can be seen from Highway 70 near the Lester T. Davis Rest Area.

The cabin to the right is the same log cabin (Figure 3) that now serves as the Beckwourth Museum; moved from its location on the old ranch to its present location along Rocky Point Road in 1985. (Plumas County Museum).

The trail along the north end of the Sierra Valley had been upgraded to a wagon road by the early 1860s; a critical outlet for Sierra Valley exports from the northern end of the valley. This road was the link between Plumas County and Reno, and to the Central Pacific Railroad once it was completed in 1869. It passed right through the Kerby Ranch.

During the first two decades of settlement in the northwestern end of the valley, the Beckwourth/Kerby Ranch continued to be a stopping point on the main road. The Beckwourth Cemetery (more recently known as Whispering Pines Cemetery) was in use just north of the ranch at least as early as March of 1862 (USGenWeb Archives 2020). In the late 1860s the town of Beckwourth began to develop a little over two miles east of the ranch where the Red Clover Road intersected with the Quincy-Reno Road.

The Red Clover Road (today's Beckwourth-Genesee Road) was completed in 1870 all the way through to Indian Valley. It became an important, albeit seasonal, freighting route allowing for even more distant agricultural exports to reach markets in Nevada (Fariss and Smith 1971 [1882]:237). It was, however, used year-round as a stage route (using sleighs when necessary) and mail delivery until 1910. In 1865, William Bringham constructed a hotel at this location (ibid:260, 262; PCHS 1968:16-17). On August 24, 1870 a post office was established here (Salley 1976). The Plumas County Map for 1874 shows the new town in its present location and names it "Beckwourth" but the name, for decades to come, was "Beckwith" due to an error in the submission of the name to the U.S. Post Office Department (**Appendix 1, Map 3**). This was not changed until 1932 (ibid). Beckwourth/Beckwith grew modestly over the next several decades reaching its zenith in the late 1800s and early 1900s (**Appendix 2**).

As early as 1868 Alex Kerby was being taxed for 160 acres along with "furnishings, wagons, a reaper, hogs, 13 head of cattle, [and] four horses" (Elliott and Kliejunas 2006:7). Most or all of the cattle listed were very likely dairy cattle. On February 10, 1876, Kerby recorded a water claim on Grizzly Creek for "Domestic and Gardening purposes" (**Figure 5**). He was named in this official documentation as Alex Kirby (not Kerby). This historic water conveyance has been in use ever since this time to irrigate the fields below the ranch. By the mid-1880s, he had expanded his land holdings to 560 acres. Alex Kerby had a large family and was very well regarded in Eastern Plumas County. His ranch remained one of the most substantial in the area throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century.

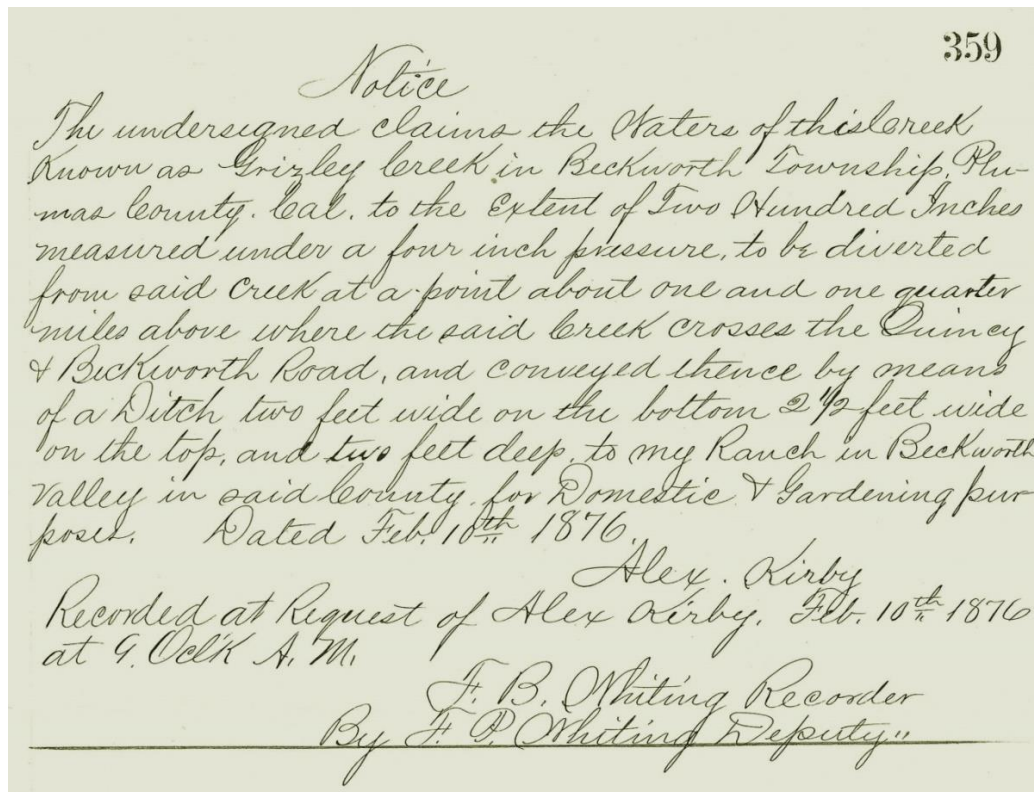


Figure 5. Alex Kirby's (Kerby) Grizzly Creek Water Claim as recorded by Plumas County on February 10, 1876.

The Sierra Valley and Mohawk Railroad was established in 1885 (Myrick 2007:116-137). This financially troubled narrow gauge railroad was the first to enter Plumas County. It began from a junction point off the Nevada, California, and Oregon Railway a few miles southwest of today's Hallelujah Junction. It climbed over Beckwourth Pass (where the old grade can still easily be seen south and above Highway 70) and continued westward along the northern margin of Sierra Valley. Here construction stalled east of Beckwith in August of 1887. Construction did not resume until 1894 when the line was sold and became the Sierra Valleys Railroad (SVRR). Following this the rails were quickly laid as far as Beckwith in June of 1895. It was pushed further west along the Middle Fork past Portola (not yet present) to a new settlement established by the railroad itself named Clairville. It reached Clio in 1903 and finally a short extension reached the Davies Sawmill (today's Graeagle) in 1916 before it ceased operations.

The SVRR right of way passed through Kerby's landholdings just south of the ranch house and barns where it had been graded but no rails laid when Alex passed away on December 1, 1888 (Elliott and Kliejunas 2006:9-10; **Appendix 1 – Map 4**). It was not until December of 1895 before the estate was settled. The Kerby family appears to have already left Plumas County prior to 1900 as none of them were captured on the U.S. Census that year. The ranch was finally sold in 1904. Personal property recorded at this time included 2 work horses, 6 mares, 1 saddle horse, 27 dairy cows, [uncounted] chickens, 6 hogs, a mowing machine and rake, 2 wagons, 1 cart, 2 sets of harness, dairy furnishings, 1 plow, 1 harrow and 100 tons of hay, along with 560 acres including the main house, barns and numerous outbuildings (Plumas County Book of Deeds – V.30, P.423, 30 March 1903).

Before his passing in 1888, Alex Kerby appears to have had some initial involvement in the establishment of a new sawmill along the SVRR within the narrow canyon west of the ranch. It was present prior to 1892 and prior to the completion of the railroad here in 1895. The mill was called the Kerby (Kerby) Band Mill early on (Myrick 2007:117). It was one of the very first in the area to use a band saw instead of circular saws; a significant technological advancement at the time. Kerby's involvement, however, was likely limited to his landholdings and the granting of right-of-ways for the new railroad (**Figure 6**). The completion of the SVRR through Eastern Plumas County was indeed a catalyst for the expansion of the lumber industry here. New sawmills were constructed and established operations found new opportunities for expansion (**Figure 7**).

Considerable Italian-Swiss immigration into Sierra Valley had been well underway by the 1880s (Hall and Hall 1973). Many of the old pioneer ranches ultimately passed to Italian-Swiss families who made a name for themselves in the region – particularly in the dairy industry. One of many instances of this was the sale of the Kerby Ranch to Alfonso Ramelli on November 3, 1904 (Elliott and Kliejunas 2006:10). Interestingly, there was more than one Ramelli family in Sierra Valley who appear to have been somewhat disassociated with one another for reasons lost to history. Alfonso and his brother David had been active in the Beckwith area prior to the purchase of the Kerby Ranch. David Ramelli was active in the vicinity at least by 1896 (Lawson 2021). Alfonso Ramelli purchased the old Ross Ranch land holdings in 1902; a total of 480 acres (John Ross had passed away in 1899) (Elliott 2004:12-14). Thus, the Ross acreage was already under Alfonso's ownership when he purchased the Kerby Ranch two years later. From this point on, the old Kerby Ranch and acreage in Ross Meadow combined to become the Ramelli Ranch.

A second railroad found its way into northwestern Sierra Valley at the turn of the century. This was the Boca and Loyalton Railroad (B&LRR), a standard gauge system that had been completed as far as burgeoning lumber center of Loyalton by July of 1901 (Myrick 2007:139-149). From here it extended northwest through the center of Sierra Valley to reach Beckwith by November 1901. This obviously provided significant competition for the SVRR. The B&LRR, while being a common carrier short line like the SVRR, directly served the expanding timber industry in the area. The Horton Brothers in Red Clover Valley and the Reno Mill and Lumber Company (now operating the old Kerby Band Mill) relocated their milling operations to Loyalton now that logs could be economically moved by rail. The new line was extended through the narrow rocky canyon west of the Ramelli Ranch by 1905 into the area where Portola would soon be established. The rails were laid on the opposite bank (south) of the Middle Fork from the SVRR so that, from Beckwith to the future site of Portola, there were now two parallel railroads in operation.

When the Western Pacific Railroad (WPRR) was constructed through this same area soon afterward (1906-1909), they purchased the B&LRR grade on the south side of the canyon and incorporated this segment into the new transcontinental line. The WPRR was completed in late 1909. Under current ownership of the Union Pacific Railroad, it remains in constant use to this day. Yet, for a short time in the 1910s, there were actually three operating railroads within the northwestern arm of Sierra Valley between Beckwith and the Ramelli Ranch area – an exceedingly rare instance (**Appendix 1, Map 5**).

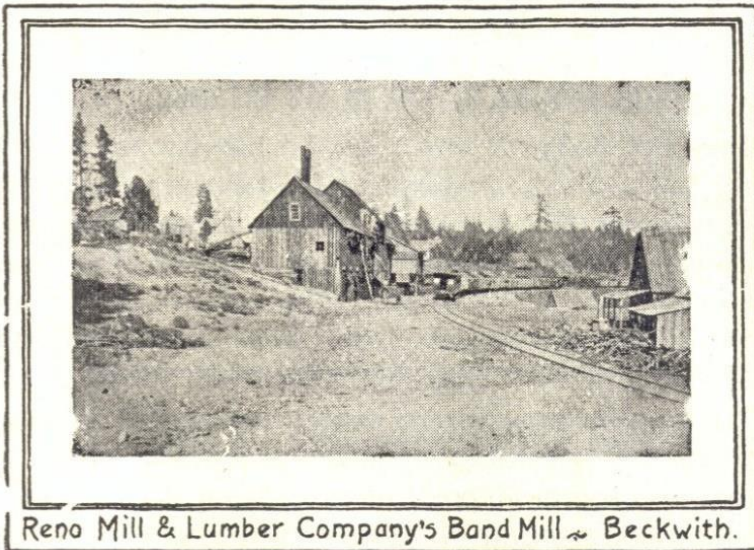
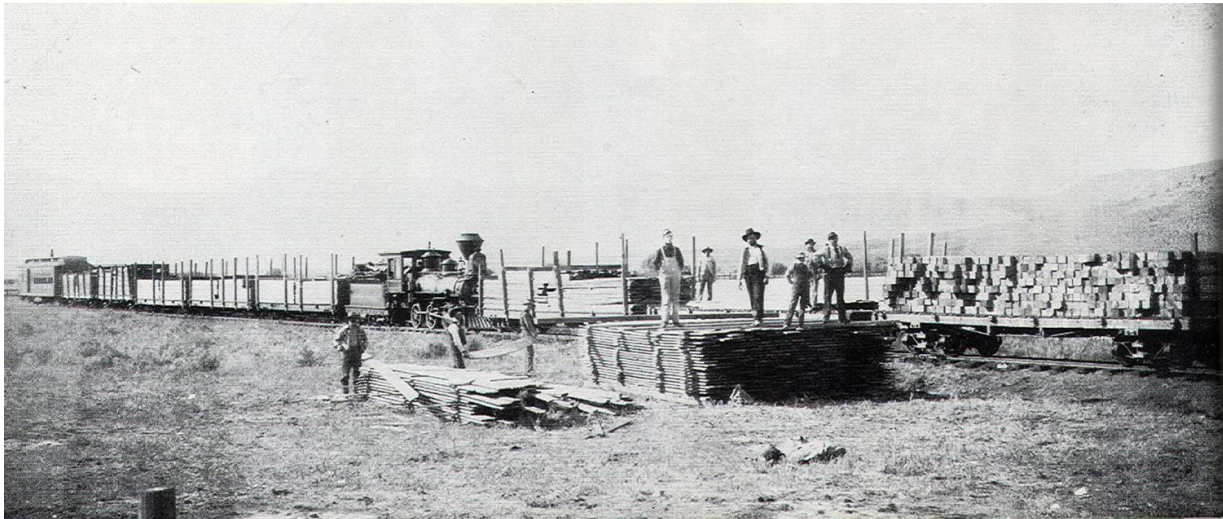


Figure 6 (left). The Reno Mill and Lumber Co. Band Mill (aka Kerby Band Mill) shown here ca. 1900. The railroad is the SVRR which was later overlain by State Highway 24 and is today's Rocky Point Road.

Figure 7 (below). Loading lumber and ties onto a SVRR train near Beckwith around 1900. This lumber likely came from the Red Clover Valley area where the Horton Brothers had operated a sawmill since the mid-1890s. (both photos - Plumas County



Sometime shortly following the completion of the B&LRR through the canyon in 1905, a railroad spur was constructed north over Alfonso Ramelli's property that extended up Grizzly Creek for a little under two miles. The spur appears to have initially been used to log the area along Grizzly Creek. Ramelli reportedly had a dispute with the placement of this spur and the B&LRR had to litigate which resulted in a payout of \$2,500 to the landowner (Myrick 2007:142).

In 1912 the Grizzly Creek Ice Company was established by local businessman Charles Gulling (Boardman 1990). Gulling had also been the manager and an investor in the Reno Mill and Lumber Company's Band Mill before it was relocated to Loyalton in 1903 (Myrick 2007:124). A concrete dam was constructed on Grizzly Creek that created a ca. 14-acre reservoir used to cut the ice in the winters for cold storage railroad box cars. Ice was also harvested directly from the Middle Fork of the Feather River in Portola near today's Gulling Bridge. The Grizzly Creek rail spur was used for several decades to move ice down to the Western Pacific Railroad for use in their cars. When the reservoir was first developed, Ramelli's ditch needed to be re-routed and Alfonso was deeded the right of way needed by the new company (Elliott and Kliejunas 2006:11).

The SVRR was finally bought out by the WPRR in 1918 and was quickly taken up (Myrick 2007:126). Two years prior they had purchased the B&LRR (ibid:144). The track leading from the Beckwith/Beckwourth area back to Loyalton was retained and used by the Clover Valley Lumber Company as part of their logging railroad mainline through 1957. The WPRR maintained it until it ceased being used at all after 2001 (Truckee-Donner Historical Society 2021). A short section of the old B&LRR mainline that reached the Grizzly Creek spur serving the ice harvesting operation was retained until the spur was finally abandoned and taken up sometime prior to 1940 (**Appendix 3**).

The Grizzly Creek Ice Company was purchased by the Clover Valley Lumber Company in 1917 who continued to run it for many years. Ice harvests were dependent on the severity of the winter with multiple “crops” being typical but there was at least one year (1934) that was so warm that no ice was cut at all (Boardman 1990). A camp for the seasonal laborers was present at the site as well as a large ice barn. Ice harvests were discontinued in 1941 as refrigeration technology matured. The site was purchased by John and Dorothy Walton in 1943 who converted it into a recreational camp. It remains active to this day as Walton’s Grizzly Lodge.

The area directly to the west and north of the Ramelli Ranch along Grizzly Creek continued to be known locally as Willow Glen. Here picnics and meetings were often held between the residents of the Portola area and the population of Beckwith and the surrounding ranches. In 1905, when construction of the WPRR was just beginning, David Jones established a hotel on his property; presumably on or close to the old main road (Lawson 2021). He moved some of the buildings left behind by the Reno Mill and Lumber Company to his hotel site. Mr. Jones was unable to procure a license from the County to sell liquor; an application that was officially protested by the WPRR. This undoubtedly cut into potential profits from the many nearby workers building the new railroad at the time. His hotel was short-lived as he passed away in 1909 and it does not appear to have continued operation after this.

The Ramelli Ranch operations were continuous throughout the first half of the twentieth century (**Figure 8**). Alfonso relinquished the ranch to his son Guido in 1919 (Hall and Hall 1973:38). Dairy operations at the ranch finally ceased in the 1950s (Sweeney 1995:13). Guido Ramelli managed the ranch until his death in 1955. Mrs. Guido Ramelli resided here through the 1970s while the ranch continued to be operated for haying and beef cattle. Highway 70 (as newly designated in 1964) had been realigned to its present location by the early 1970s cutting between the old ranch and the cemetery. The old highway following the Middle Fork through the canyon became Rocky Point Road. As noted above, the log cabin attributed to James Beckwourth was moved off the old ranch property in 1985 and is now serves as the Beckwourth Museum. Ownership of the ranch remained with the Ramelli family up until 1978 when it was sold to the Ramelli Investment Group (Sweeney 1995:13). In September of 1980, 1,723 acres of agricultural land to the south and east of the old ranch was purchased by the USDA Forest Service. The old house and barns remain in private ownership. In December of 1980, the water rights and a 10-foot wide easement from the old Grizzly Ice Dam extending to the outlet just above the Middle Fork were also deeded to the Forest Service which has been continually maintained and used.



Figure 8. The Ramelli family stands on the front porch of their home in the early 1900s. The old wagon Quincy-Reno Road continued to pass right past the front door well into the automotive age of the early 1900s but, by the 1930s, the highway had been re-routed to the south. This photo was taken from the road looking back to the northwest. Compare with Figure 4. (Plumas County Museum).

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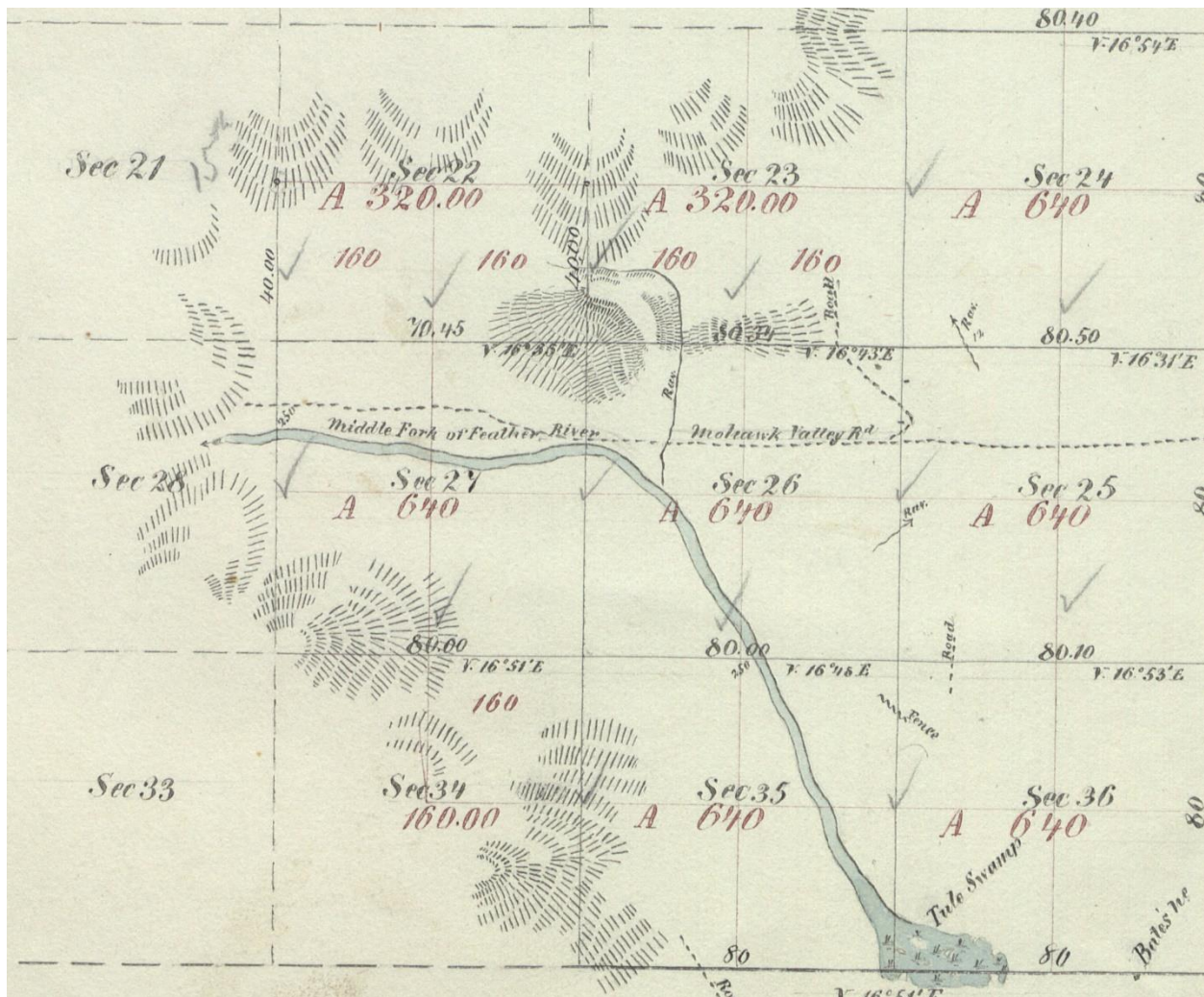
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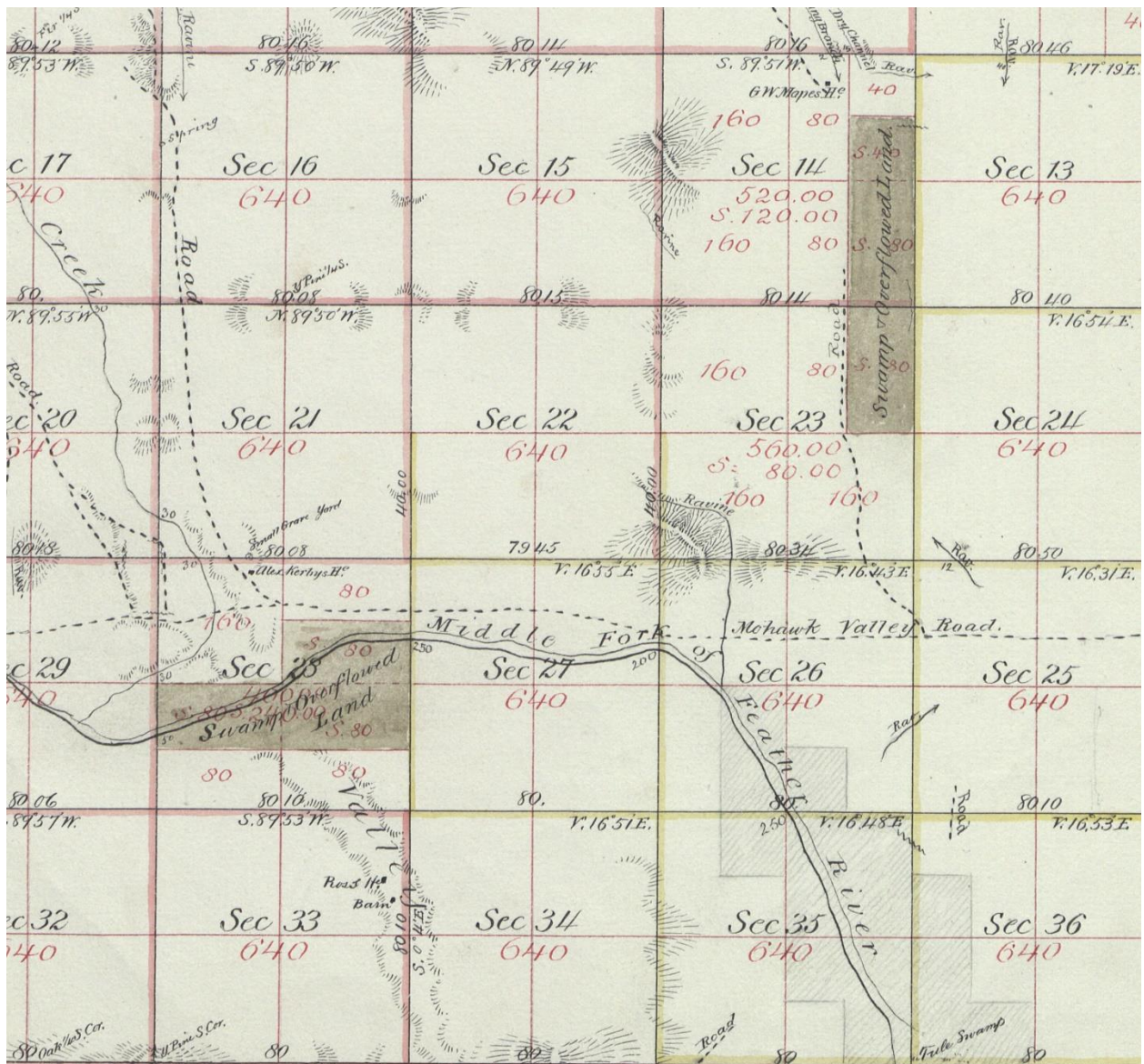
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Brief History of the Ramelli Ranch Vicinity – Elliott, 2021

Appendix 1 – Historic Maps showing the Ramelli Ranch Vicinity

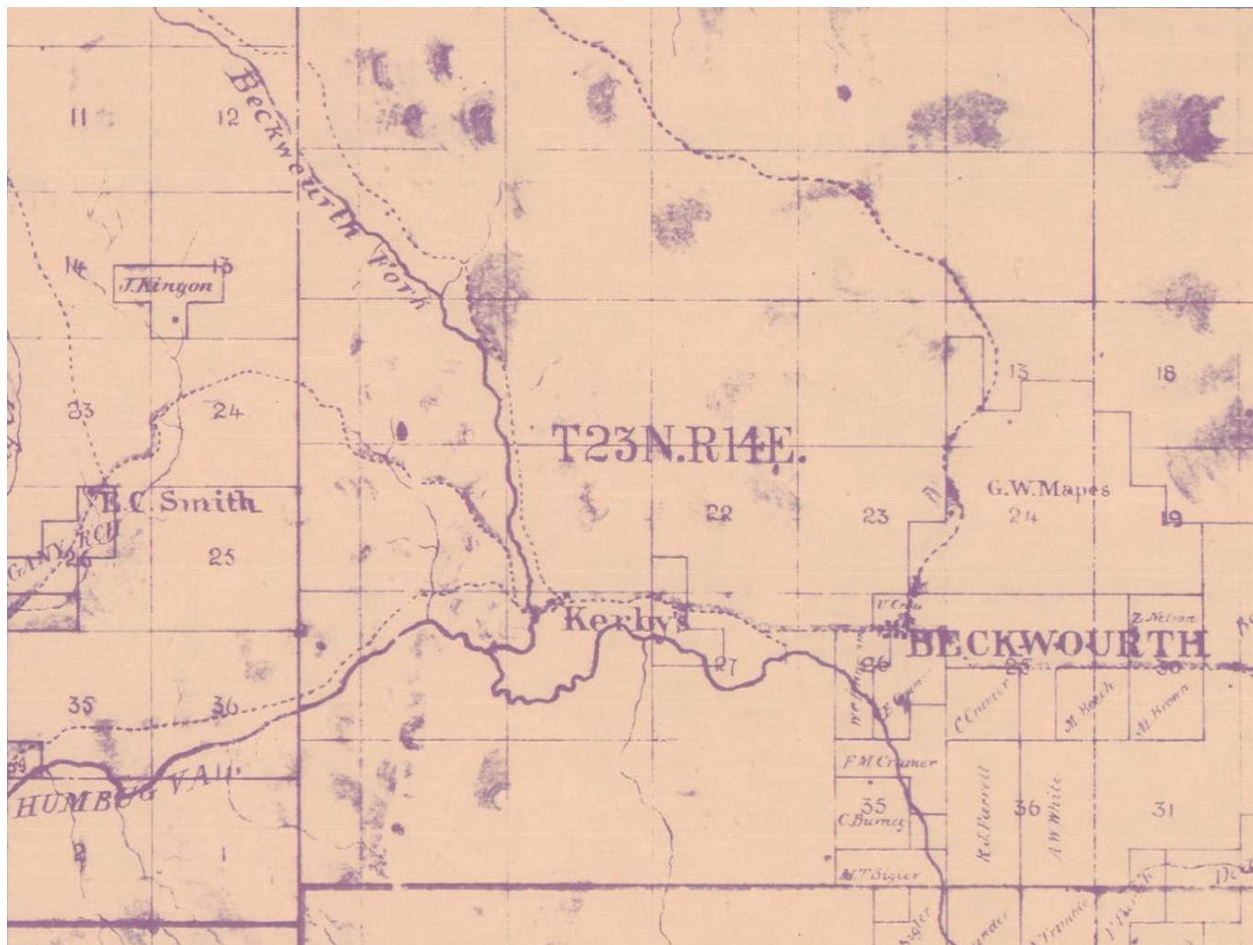


Map 1: A clip of the Government Land Office (GLO) plat 1864 for Township 23 North, Range 14 East. Only the Mohawk Valley Road, which was the route of the Quincy – Reno Wagon Road, is shown as an improvement in this early survey but the Beckwourth Ranch was present, of course, along with others in this location. The ownership of the ranch between Jim Beckwourth's departure in the mid to late 1850s, and Alex Kerby's arrival by 1866 is not clear in the historic record. The north trending Red Clover Road in the northeast ¼ of Section 26 is shown but it was not completed as a wagon road through to Indian Valley until 1870.



Map 2: A clip of the GLO Plat 1875 for Township 23 North, Range 14 East showing “Alex Kerbys Ho” and just to the north a “Small Grave Yard.” The Mohawk Valley Road was the Quincy – Reno Road running straight east across the northern end of Sierra Valley. The town of Beckwourth is not yet shown (northeast ¼ of Section 26) although at least some settlement was present by this time. The north trending road that was the Red Clover Road through to Indian Valley is shown. The Mohawk Valley Road up to Kirby’s Ranch then branching north through the west half of Section 21 is the route of the Beckwourth Emigrant Trail.

“Swamp and Overflowed Land” is defined as wetlands (e.g. marshlands) found unfit for cultivation without drainage or levees.

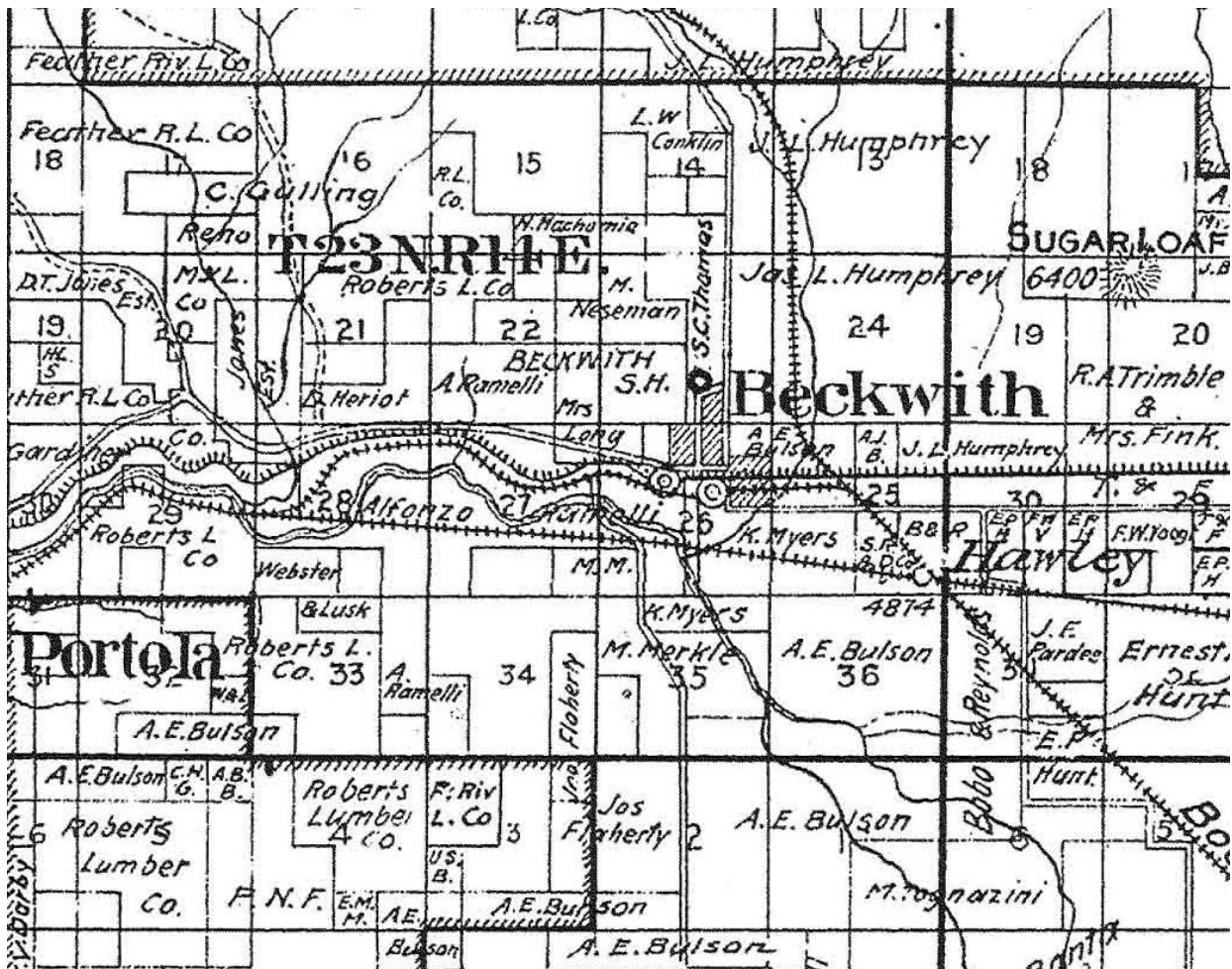


Map 3: Clip of the 1874 Map of Plumas County prominently showing “Kerby’s” and the newly established town of Beckwourth (Beckwith) and the early roads. Note all the land holdings in the area around the town where the pioneer ranches were already being subdivided into smaller parcels. Note also George Mapes land holdings to the north of Beckwourth. Mapes literally began a cattle empire from his Sierra Valley ranch but he had sold the ranch here and re-located to the Reno area in early 1880s (Cafferata 2005:59-68). Note that Grizzly Creek is named as “Beckwourth’s Fork” of the Middle Fork of the Feather River. The 1875 GLO plat of the same area, however, names it Grizzly Creek.



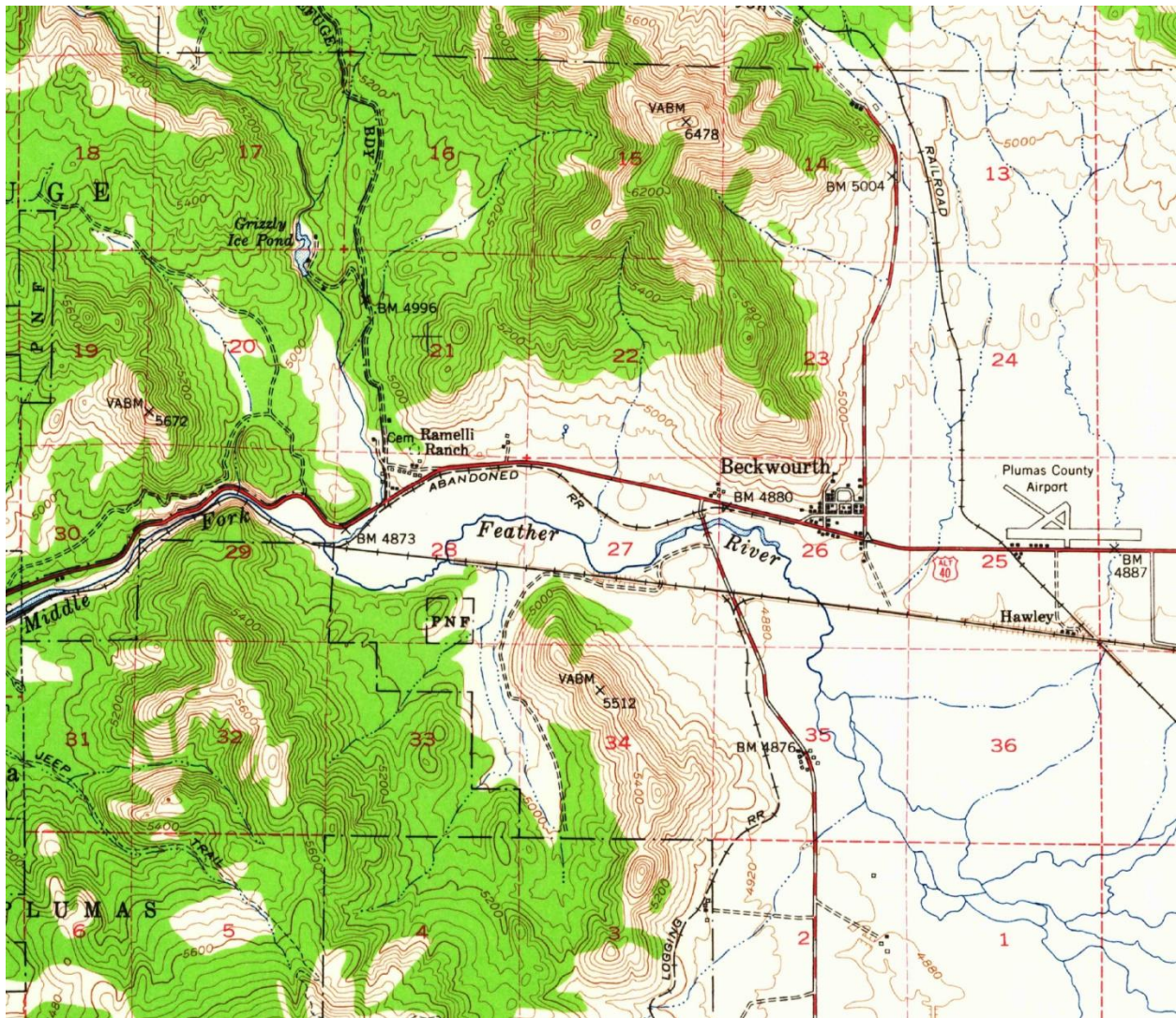
Map 4: Clip of the 1892 Map of Plumas County again shows “Kerby’s” prominently but the land is shown as under the ownership of Mrs. A. Kerby as Alex had passed away in December of 1888. Note also the landholdings of John Ross (J.B.) to the south that was purchased by Alfonso Ramelli in 1902. This purchase did include the land now owned by John’s son James Ross (J.L.) in Section 22.

The Sierra Valleys Railroad is shown extending through the Kerby landholdings but was only graded without rails which would not happen until 1895. The “Saw Mill” that was known early on as the Kerby Band Mill is present here by this time.



Map 5: Clip of the 1912 Map of Plumas County showing all three railroads in place between Beckwith/Beckworth and Rocky Point: the Sierra Valleys Railway to the north, the Boca and Loyaltan Railroad just below but also north of the river, and the brand new Western Pacific Railroad to the south bypassing Beckworth. The Western Pacific had bought the right of way from the Boca and Loyaltan through the narrow canyon leading to Portola. Note Alfonso Ramelli's extensive land holdings including the old Ross Ranch area to the south.

Three separate railroads passing through a rural valley, even for only a few short years, is almost unheard of historically. The Western Pacific rapidly bought out and did away with both of the older lines.



Map 6: Clip from the Portola 15' (1:62500) 1950 quadrangle showing the alignment of what was then State Highway 24 as it dipped south of the Ramelli Ranch and entered the canyon following today's Rocky Point Road. The current alignment of Highway 70 extends between the Ramelli Ranch and the cemetery then cuts through the hills north of the canyon.

A portion of the long abandoned Boca and Loyaltown Railroad is still shown on the map but not the older Sierra Valleys grade that was mostly beneath the highway in this area. The old spur heading up to the Grizzly Ice Pond is also not shown. The railroad to the south of Beckwourth was the link to Calpine, a large lumbering concern at the southeast end of Sierra Valley. This grade had not been used for years when it was depicted here in 1950. The railroad grade north and east of Beckwourth, however, was still in use by the Clover Valley Lumber Co. It was discontinued and taken up in the 1956-1957 timeframe. The old ex-Boca and Loyaltown/Clover Valley grade continuing south of Hawley was maintained as a link to Loyaltown by the Western Pacific and still exists (2021) but is no longer used.

Brief History of the Ramelli Ranch Vicinity – Elliott, 2021

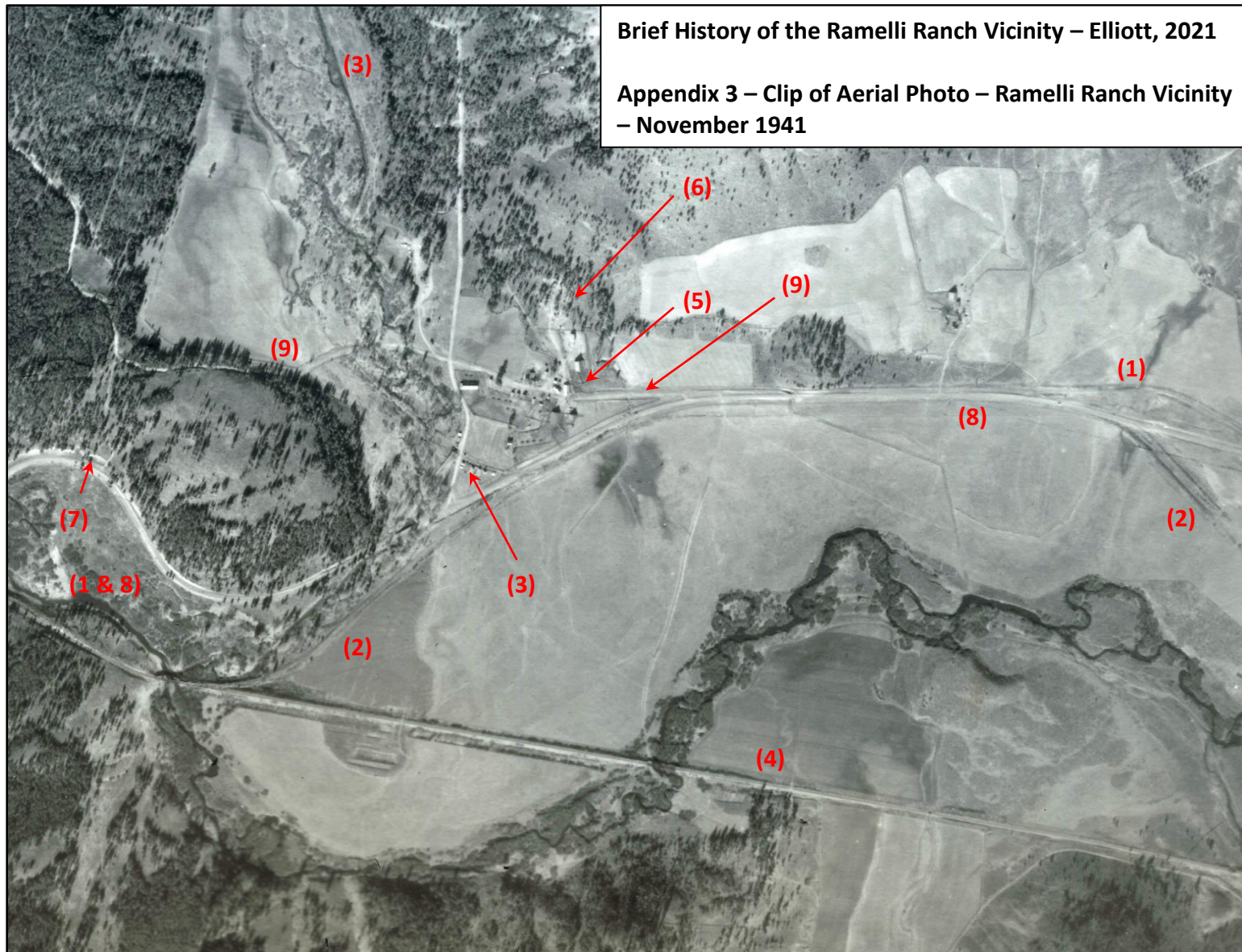
Appendix 2 – Panorama of the Town of Beckwith (Beckwourth) ca. 1915

A series of three photos from the hillside just north of town looking back to the east, south and southwest. The photos were taken ca. 1915 but show the town largely as it would have appeared in the 1890-1915 timeframe. The brick building in the center of the second photograph is the Mason's Hall constructed ca. 1909 that still stands today.

The third photo shows the meadow area west toward the old Ramelli Ranch.

(Courtesy of the Plumas County Museum)





Aerial photograph CXW 21-160 taken on 5 November 1941 showing the Ramelli Ranch Vicinity. 1) Sierra Valleys RR bed, 2) Boca & Loyalton RR bed, 3) Grizzly Ice Pond Spur (already long abandoned), 4) Western Pacific RR (Union Pacific RR as of 1982), 5) Beckwourth/Kerby/Ramelli Ranch, 6) Beckwourth Cemetery (aka Whispering Pines), 7) Kerby Band Mill/ Reno Mill & Lumber Co. Sawmill site, 8) State Route 24 (Hwy 70 as of 1964), 9) Reno-Quincy Wagon/Stage Road.

Brief History of the Ramelli Ranch Vicinity, Sierra Valley, CA

Extra Notes

Daniel Elliott, M.A.

February 8, 2021

The Beckwourth Trail extended through today's town of Beckwourth and continued west more or less along today's Hwy 70 then running through the old Kerby/Ramelli Ranch where Jim Beckwourth established his trading post-ranch in 1852. From there the trail turned north following the eastern bank of Grizzly Creek toward Grizzly Valley and beyond. Its greatest use as an emigrant trail was between 1851 through 1855. There is little or no sign of it in its historic form in the Ramelli Ranch area.

A 1975 published soil survey of Sierra Valley identifies the Beckwourth area as one of the prime sections of the valley in terms of crop yield – i.e. alfalfa-grains-hay (Sketchley 1975:64). Bounded by a comparatively close line of hills to the north and south and with a constrained outlet for the river, water retention is naturally high yet much of it is still reasonably well drained. Little improvement would have been required for raising hay and providing excellent forage for cattle in the early days. Kerby's 1870s ditch diverting water from Grizzly Creek would have, of course, increased effectiveness significantly allowing, among other advantages, harvesting of multiple crops in a single season.

Sketchley, Harold R.

1975 Soil Survey of Sierra Valley Area, California, Parts of Sierra, Plumas, and Lassen Counties. USDA Soil Conservation Service and Forest Service. University of California Agricultural Experiment Station.

It is not clear when the moniker "Willow Glen" was first applied to the lower reaches of Grizzly Creek near the outlet with the Middle Fork (the area where the Beckwourth Museum cabin is now). No real community aside the Beckwourth/Kirby/Ramelli Ranch was ever present here. It appears to have been a pleasant meeting area in the spring through fall – a kind of meeting place between Portola residents and the Sierra Valley population – where picnics or other gatherings would often occur and is often mentioned in this regard by local newspapers in the early twentieth century. Jones' ca. 1905-1910 hotel here was very short lived.

There were Ramelli's in the Vinton area, there were also Ramelli's in the Loyalton area, then there were the Ramelli's of Beckwith/Beckwourth vicinity beginning with the brothers David and Alfonso. Nephew of the brothers immigrated to California late and wound up purchasing the Illinois Ranch east of Quincy in 1920. The Ramelli families in and around Sierra Valley described, as best it is known, in Hall and Hall's *Italian-Swiss Settlement in Plumas County: 1860 – 1920* (p. 41-43).

Historic Themes represented:

- 1) Native American settlement pattern, resource use and procurement, inter-tribal relations and trade
- 2) Early Euro-American westward exploration, emigration and settlement (esp. James P. Beckwourth)
- 3) Early ranching and dairy industry
- 4) Transportation – early roads
- 5) Transportation – railroads
- 6) Lumbering (in the vicinity)
- 7) Ice harvesting industry (nearby)