

Earl's Diary - Friday, April 1, 2016

Aha!!! Now we know why the title "April Fools Gathering" for this assemblage of people!

Dear Loyal Readers, thank you for joining me again today.

This morning is the day for our tour of the Camden House. I had to get up (almost in the middle of the night - that's 7:30 am for me) to meet everyone by 9:00am to travel 6 miles west on Highway 299 to the Tower District of the park. We have been granted a personal tour of the Camden Historic House. The house is not open too many days of the year, so we felt honored to be able to see the inside.

Many of us carpoled and met at the parking lot for the area. There we met Interpretive Ranger Matt who was to be our guide.



Before we continue with the tour -- this was the only time I could corral the entire 21 people all in one spot for the group picture! So - - here is the whole motley crew at the April Fools Gathering. Thank you Ranger Matt for taking the picture.

Now, on with the tour!



Charles Camden, who stressed patience, perseverance, and permanence, built this house as a one-room structure in 1852. Living here with his wife and family, he extracted \$80,000 worth of gold from Clear Creek and its tributaries over an 18-year period. His enduring mining success was a rarity for the Shasta area.



As the Camdens' wealth and family grew, so did their home. By 1867 they had three daughters, and Camden added two rooms to the house, as well as a full second story. Behind the house he built a summer kitchen, servant's quarters, and a woodshed. Today the Camden House is one of Shasta County's oldest houses.



Here's me again, just to prove I was there!



Today's present front room - this was the one room structure of the original house.



In a double ceremony with Levi Tower and his bride. Camden married Levi's sister Philena.



One of the upstairs bedrooms

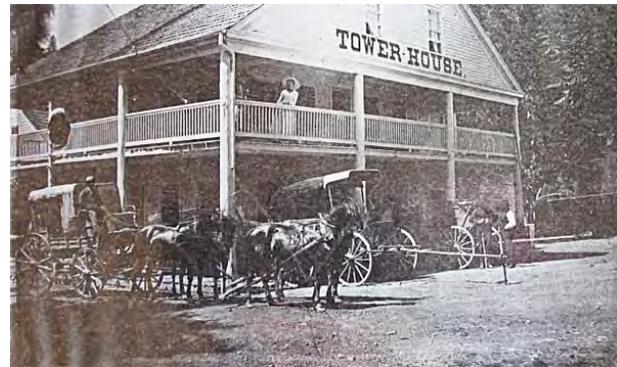
For most '49ers the big strike was always in the next shovelful. Those who combined hard work with luck, and succeeded, were exceptions.

Charles Camden and Levi Tower became friends and partners in San Francisco in spring 1850. They sailed in search of the Trinity River's mouth, then traveled overland to Whiskeytown's northern diggings. Camden built a one room cabin and a mining operation, sawmill, and water ditches. Later he erected toll roads and bridges. Camden House is the park's only surviving historic structure.

Tower made his fortune by providing food and shelter to miners. He then invested his profits in the 21-room Tower House luxury hotel, gardens, and orchards.



Behind the house was a storage shed and outdoor kitchen



How did Camden make his millions? To cross Clear Creek in 1865 it would have cost 10 cents to walk across, 25 cents to ride over on horseback, and \$1.25 to cross by wagon. Charles Camden, the bridge owner, spent \$20,000 to improve the road between here and the town of Shasta. He widened the road, built a bridge over Whiskey Creek, and improved and covered the bridge over this creek.

The investment paid off. With a franchise obtained from the State of California, Camden collected tolls for 50 years from travelers going between Shasta and Weaverville.

Just up the slope from the Camden house once stood a 21 room hotel called the Tower House. Built by enterprising Levi Tower in 1852-53, the hotel was known widely for its lavish entertainment and Tower's delicious homegrown fruits and vegetables.

The Tower House served travelers for more than 60 years. Levi Tower, however, suffered heavy losses in other business ventures, causing him to declare bankruptcy in 1859. Tower's brother-in-law Charles Camden rescued the hotel by purchasing it and then leasing it back to Tower. In 1865 Tower died of typhoid fever at 45 years of age. The Tower House Hotel was destroyed by fire in 1919.





On our way back to camp, we took a side road into the very small community of French Gulch. The purpose for the side trip was to have lunch at this historic hotel. We had been told that the hamburgers were scrumptious! We kind of shook up the owner when all 18 of us descended on the place right at opening time - without advance notice! It all worked out in the end because we were not in a hurry. It gave us a chance to visit with each other. And the hamburgers WERE scrumptious. The patties were as big around as the very substantial buns.



French Gulch was founded by French miners in 1849 and became one of California's major gold producing areas. The town became a major supply place when it became the terminus of the western branch of the California Trail. French Gulch was registered as a California Historical Landmark in 1935.

It appeared that the hotel was the only open business in the community. The General Store (above) was closed - for good! The only activity was around the French Gulch Post Office.

On August 14, 2004, the entire town of French Gulch was evacuated due to a forest fire which roared out of control through much of Shasta County. The fire burned 13,005 acres and destroyed 26 residences, 1 commercial building, and 76 outbuildings. The evacuation lasted 3 days, allowing residents to return home on August 17, 2004. The 2010 census reported that French Gulch had a population of 346.

This evening a group of us once again enjoyed sitting around the Campfire in a Can. As the evening air was turning chilly, most of us scampered off to bed fairly early. Thanks for coming along with me today. - - Earl

Earl's Diary - Saturday, April 2, 2016

This morning was another beautiful clear day. Many of our group were off doing their own things. I had plans to visit a couple sites on my own list.

I had heard rumors that the Whiskeytown Cemetery was ONE interesting place and not to be missed! That was first on my list for today. I rounded up Dave and we headed off to see what all the talk was about.

You need to understand that the original Whiskeytown location is now under 120 feet of water. By 1959, when construction of the Whiskeytown Dam and reservoir began, barely two hundred people remained in the town. Within a few years the inhabitants had moved away, the townsite was razed, and the store, post office and cemetery were relocated to higher ground.

The Whiskeytown Cemetery, now located in it's new location, is still an active Shasta County cemetery.

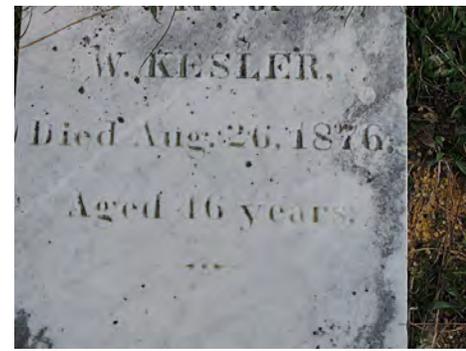


It certainly was an interesting cemetery. I'm not sure I've seen one just like it. It is located on a hillside with graves going up and down the hillside, and even under trees.



I was particularly interested in finding the old Whiskeytown graves that had been relocated from the original town. Most of the graves were from the 1900's, even some from the 2000's. The newest one I could find was dated 2012. I finally found a really old section. That is what I had been looking for!





Many of the grave sites had been personalized with benches, sculptures, crosses, and whatever anyone seemed to want. There was an abundance of artificial flowers. Someone mentioned that the previous Sunday had been Easter Sunday. That may account for the excess color.



The orange boa added color to the solemnity to the occasion.



The white picket fence added formality!



Stainless steel crosses



An old saw blade?



After forty-five minutes it was time to move to the next destination.

This one had a cage all around it - even on the top. It must have been there for quite awhile. The tree was growing right out the top. Was it trying to escape?

Yesterday we spent the morning touring the Camden House. I felt there was much more to see, so I talked Dave into going back to the area for a closer look.



A gentle, wide path leads to some of the original, restored sights of the area.



By the mid-1880s, long after most other miners had moved on, Camden invested some of his money in the construction of a toll road between the Tower House and Shasta. This proved so profitable that Camden ceased his mining and sawmill operations.

The system of water ditches he started eventually stretched over forty miles.



We figured this was some sort of crusher



Nothing remains of the saw mill but a sign where it once was.



The Tower grave site could be seen through the remnants of the apple orchard.



Many of the heritage apple trees have been around for more than a century - and their condition shows it.



On our way back to camp, I noticed a sign on Highway 299 that pointed to "Whiskeytown" 1/4 mile with an arrow pointing to the left. Knowing that Whiskeytown was to the right AND 120 feet under water, I wondered what we would see. So, off we went.

After we got there, a sign announced that this building was salvaged from the original town site and moved to this location. So this was "New Whiskeytown"? Well, neither the general store and post office were operational. In fact, the National Park Service hasn't expended any money in protecting the building and it is in serious disrepair.

To add a postscript to the Camden/  
Tower pioneer era:

Desiring a solid education for his  
daughters, Camden sold his interest in  
the Tower House and moved his family  
to a new home in Oakland. The old  
home on Clear Creek became a  
summer retreat.

Camden died in 1912 at the full age  
of ninety-five

I am a Native Californian. I was born in southern  
California where Spanish/Mexican history is most  
prevalent. I have now lived in Sacramento County for the  
last 58 years. It was in this part of the state where the  
discovery of gold hastened the formation of the state. I  
have done lots of exploration of the central California gold  
rush towns but this was my first visit to the northern state  
gold rush sights. This has been, for me, an interesting  
walk through the history of the area.

The weather cooperated for our tour today. We enjoyed the  
green flat meadows, the ups and downs of the foothills, the oak  
and pine trees, and the rushing waters of nearby creeks.

We had to hurry back to camp. It was time for the daily nap.  
Later in the evening a group of we campers were scheduled for  
a pizza dinner at Old Mill Deli in nearby Redding. This time we  
warned the place there would be 18 of us. Well, I'm off for my  
nap. Thanks for coming along with me today.

Bye for now - - Earl

Earl's Diary - Sunday, April 3, 2013

Dear Loyal Readers,

This has been a most interesting and educational gathering. It started out as a DOG  
gathering (DisOrganized Gathering) The only plan was to attend the special tour that was  
arranged for us at the Camden House. The rest of the time everyone was to act as their own  
social director. That worked well because everyone did their own thing. Some went  
historical sightseeing while others spent the time lounging around camp, still others went  
on strenuous hikes in the nearby mountains. By noon time today, people were starting to pull  
out for the trek home.

My plan is to spend the day in camp. Five people have indicated they will be staying  
until tomorrow morning. Rumor has it that an impromptu potluck is being planned for dinner  
this evening.



The Final  
Trailer Tally

Scamp 13 - 1  
Scamp 16 - 3  
Casita 17 - 6  
RPod 17 - 1  
Escape 19- 1



How many people does it take to hook up an RPod? For this particular one, I count at least 3! Two outside the Tow vehicle, and one inside.



The job done and they are on the way home.



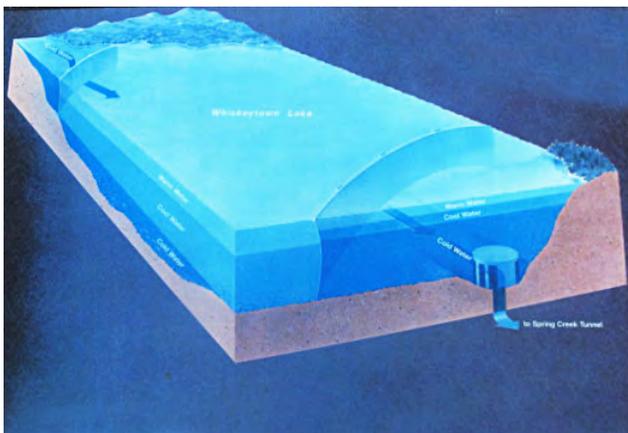
I did learn one very interesting fact today on my last trip to the visitor center. The views below were taken from an overlook at the visitor center.

These buoys are not to keep boaters away from swimmers but to keep water away from water -- warm water from cold water that is. The buoys are attached to a rubber curtain that drops 100 feet below the water surface. A small curtain anchored at the upper end of the lake forces the cold incoming water toward the lake bottom. Working together, they trap the lake's sun-warmed surface water, preventing it from mixing with the deeper, cold water. The cold water flows below this curtain as it exists, bound for the Sacramento River.



Why all the fuss? Beginning in the 1940s, Chinook eggs and fry declined in the warmer stream waters created by the damming of the Sacramento River and its tributaries.

To save Chinook salmon spawning grounds in the Sacramento River. Chinook eggs and fry require temperatures below 56 degrees to survive. The cool water discharged from Whiskeytown Lake makes the difference, by a matter of degrees.



It's no more sightseeing for me. So, I will bid you all adieu until my next trip, wherever that may be. Once again, thank you for trailing along with me.

Bye for now - - Earl