

## Butte County – a Thumbnail Sketch

Butte County, sparsely settled in the 1840s, boomed to prosperity in the 1850s as miners combed the branches and tributaries of the Feather River for gold.

Butte's varied geography shaped its history: Vast rich soils deposited by the Sacramento River (the county's western boundary) provided the land for major agricultural production.

Gold bearing rock at the northern end of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range was rich in gold. Dozens of small mining communities developed in this area, most now gone, many beneath the waters of Lake Oroville.

North of the Feather River drainage, where the southern tip of the volcanic Cascade Mountain range overlaps the Sierra Nevada, lava flows from Mt. Lassen created rocky ground and shallow soils, most of which became grazing land and, in the mountains, timber industries.

Two major towns emerged:

Oroville ('oro' being the Spanish word for gold) emerged as a major mining town, at one time one of the largest cities in California. It became the seat of County government.

Chico, named for the Mexican land grant 'Rancho Arroyo Chico' was located on rich farm land along the Sacramento River, and on the route to Oregon. It became a center for agriculture and transportation, including being the terminus of a road to the mines in Idaho.

### Other Historical Society facilities:

#### The Archives

The Butte County Historical Society houses a research center adjacent to the Museum, which should be your first stop for local history research in Butte County.

#### The Ehmann Home on Lincoln St. in Oroville

An early 20<sup>th</sup> century Craftsman home of Freda Ehmann, founder of the black olive industry.

#### The Oregon City School

An 1870's school house near Table Mountain

#### The Bangor Church

Historic church in the town of Bangor

WELCOME  
to the

## BUTTE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM



**The Butte County Historical Society  
Museum presents nuggets of County  
history with artifacts from our  
collections.**

Butte County Historical Society  
Museum and Archives  
1749 Spencer St.  
P.O. Box 2195  
Oroville CA 95965  
533-9418

***“Your first stop  
for local history in Butte County”***

( open Fridays 9 – 12 and Saturdays 11 – 3 )

## Notes on the Museum's Exhibits

### ***“Labor, Leisure, and Luminaries”***

Tidbits of life in Butte County of the past.

First, orient yourself in Butte County, using the map on the back side of the title panel. Note how the four major branches of the Feather River, and other streams flowing from the mountains on the east to the Sacramento River on the west, dominate, thus influencing history of the county.

1) **Gold Mining.** Old photographs show placer mining, hydraulic mining and dredging, a succession of methods to extract gold from the Feather River and its tributaries.

2) **Bank.** The beautifully painted door of the vault (mfr. 1887, from Butte Co. Courthouse) sets the scene for the exchange of gold nuggets and gold dust for cash. The historic scales for weighing gold, from the Bank of America in Oroville, were used continuously from the 1850's until 1968.

3) The Lee **Pharmacy** operated in Chico from 1857 to 1994 is typical of the many pharmacies in the area selling patent medicines as well as filling prescriptions.

4) **Dentist's Office**, typical of the 1930s.

5) **Photographers.** Over 100 photographers were in business in Butte County between 1865 and 1930 when home photography became common. Flip through images taken by photographers Oliver Moll and John Hogan, and try out the stereopticon slide viewer.

6) **The Building of Oroville Dam.** Located at a point below the confluence of the four major branches of the wide-spreading Feather River (West Branch, North Fork, Middle Fork and South Fork), Oroville Dam controls flooding and stores water for other parts of California. Many dam workers pictured in these construction photos remained in the area. Try out the rivet-setting tool on the girder!

7) **Post Office.** Miners and early settlers cherished receiving letters from their families "back east." An envelope addressed with only a person's name and town was held at the Post Office, stored in the slots alphabetically until the recipient came to pick it up.

8) **The Room Diorama** is created in the style of the **Ehmann Home**. It is used to display a variety of early 20<sup>th</sup> century household items from the Society's collections.

9) **Miniature Victorian House**, a replica of the maker's childhood home in Chico. Note the great detail, and some of the features that made Valley's summer heat and winter cold bearable before central heating and air conditioning, such as the deep porch, the tall ceilings, and the sleeping porch.

10) **Dressed up to Go Out.** Victorian styles were as important here as in other parts of the country. Wives of successful miners and businessmen had clothing and hats made at home or by dress-makers and milliners. After the railroad was built in 1878, it became an easy trip to San Francisco to shop for the latest fashions. Or one could shop at local department stores such as Oser's in Chico or City of Paris in Oroville.

11) **Robin Hood, the film.** The pristine natural settings in Chico's huge Bidwell Park set the scene for "Sherwood Forest" in the 1937 film "Robin Hood". Enjoy a fascinating locally made movie of work on the movie sets during making of the film, featuring Olivia de Haviland, Errol Flynn and Basil Rathbone 'off camera'.

12) **Erle Stanley Gardner**, creator of the Perry Mason books and TV series, grew up in Butte County. Listen to his own account of his rather unsuccessful career at Oroville High School.

13) **Ishi, the last of the Yahi Tribe.** Most of Ishi's people had been slaughtered in the Mill Creek massacre in 1868, following numerous settler/Indian conflicts. A small group of survivors hid in the hills. In 1911, after all the others had died, Ishi made his way to Oroville where puzzled officials, unable to communicate with him, lodged him in the jail for lack of a better alternative.

14) **Ehmann Olive Co.** Olive trees flourished in Butte County's Mediterranean climate. Oroville resident Freda Ehmann presided over the company that she founded after experimenting with pickling olives at home, the beginning of a major black olive industry in Northern California.