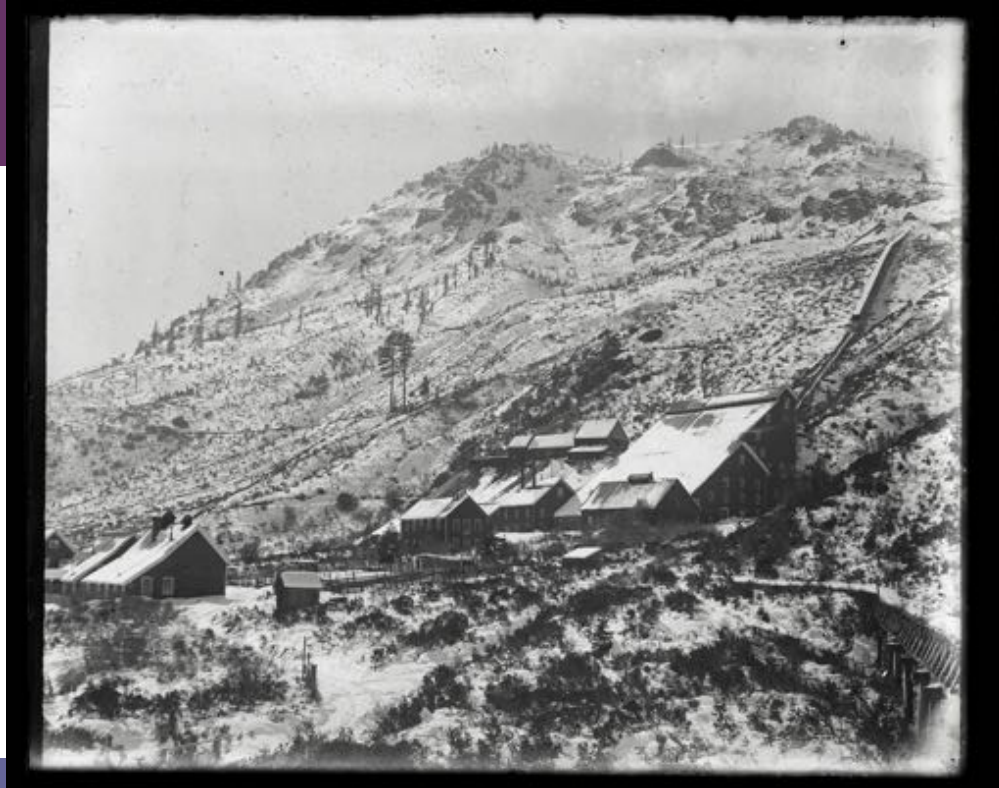


SPRING-SUMMER 2022

Johnsville Historical Society

A nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the gold-mining history of Johnsville, California



Deciphering the Mysteries of the Woodward Drawings

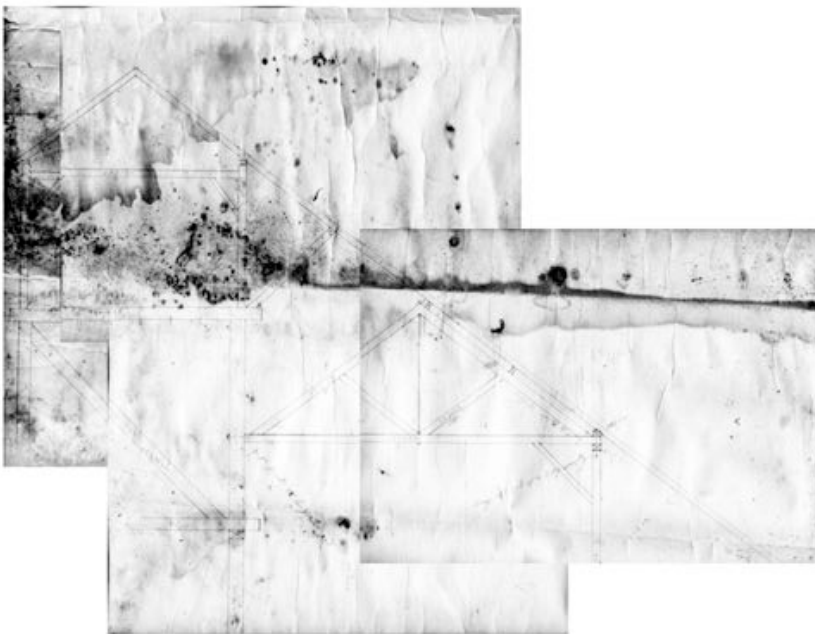
BY BRUCE MACGREGOR

Like the popular “CSI: Crime Scene Investigation” television series, Johnsville has its mysteries, with dedicated detectives intent on solving them.

In 1975, longtime Johnsville resident David Daun discovered a box of deteriorated drawings in the attic of what was once George Woodward’s Johnsville home. For years, Woodward was the millwright at the Plumas–Eureka Mine. He designed and built massive timber peg structures, such as ore trams, barns, shops, and stamp-mill buildings, including the Mohawk Stamp Mill built in 1878—the centerpiece of today’s Plumas–Eureka State Park.

Deciphering the Mysteries of the Woodward Drawings (*continued*)

Daun quickly concluded two things about the drawings in the Woodward attic: First, they were in terrible condition, stuck together after years of water dripping on them from the roof and attacked by mold, and second, at least one of them was an elevation drawing of what appeared to be a stamp mill. This drawing contains no title or identification, but its general appearance and dimensional detail could be an early concept drawing of the Mohawk Stamp Mill in Johnsville, California.



ABOVE: Damaged Woodward drawings discovered in the old Woodward home in Johnsville.

Johnsville Historical Society Collection

PREVIOUS PAGE: Photographed by Richard White circa 1900, the Mohawk Stamp Mill and supporting structures sit idle under a mantle of snow. By this time, the British Company had sold the Plumas–Eureka Mine property, and the new owners had reduced active production to nearly nothing. *John I. MacGregor Collection*

With parts of this and other drawings fused together by water damage, there is no easy way to reveal more details without risking destruction of the drawings. The other drawings also might be of the mill, providing additional valuable design details. Consider the possibilities: If enough of the original Mohawk

Deciphering the Mysteries of the Woodward Drawings *(continued)*

Stamp Mill drawings had survived and could be made legible, a historical treasure trove of information would be available to help guide the restoration process of the nearly 150-year-old mill structure. This assumes the old mill survives long enough to be restored. Seriously damaged by winter storms, even the temporary repairs provided by the state of California are no longer an effective barrier against the entire structure's imminent collapse. It's as if Woodward's drawings and the historic structure that may be represented in them are in a race to see which one disappears first.

Perhaps they can save each other.

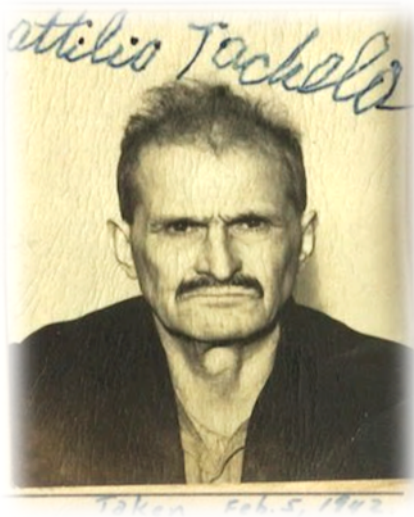
Early in 2022, the Johnsville Historical Society (JHS), which owns the Woodward drawings, embarked on a plan to repair and conserve the historical documents. JHS has identified a conservator at Zukor Art Conservation in Oakland, California, who has the skills to conserve and repair many of the drawings. And promising test repairs have already been made on two drawings.

At about the same time, the Sierra District of the California Department of Parks placed full restoration of the Mohawk Stamp Mill at number two on its list of priority projects. But since the estimated cost is \$5 million dollars, restoration of the mill is in the company of serious competition. In addition, projects at the top of the list that exceed \$1 million dollars are subject to approval by the California State Legislature. And priorities on this project list can change as more critical needs come up before the Legislature, such as emergency repairs for parks damaged by wildfires.

In the meantime, the Plumas–Eureka State Park Association has been keeping the State Parks informed about the mill's deteriorating condition. Damage from winter snow is cumulative. By the winter of 2022, the wooden structure holding up the mill's roof had noticeably sagged, allowing water to enter the building, in turn increasing the rate of damage. State Parks has recommended a work-around to full funding: secure a series of smaller grants that could cover the costs of the stabilization projects, at least enough to keep the mill standing until funds for a full restoration can be secured. News about these smaller stabilization grants is expected in July or August 2022. *(continued on page 6)*

Revisiting Johnsville's Last Gold Miner

Editor's Note: In the last edition of the Johnsville Historical Society's newsletter, David Daun wrote a profile of Attilio Domenico Tacchella, by all accounts the last gold miner in Johnsville. This colorful character prompted many Johnsville residents to share with us their own memories of Mr. Tacchella, which were simply too good not to share with you. Here are two of those Tacchella tales.



Sequel no. 1, by **Carolyn Nystrom**, whose family has owned a cabin in Johnsville for many years

At the young and tender age of 10, I remember our friend, Attilio Tacchella, serenading the village people of Johnsville with Italian operas. The year my father built our cabin in Johnsville, Attilio was still mining. On weekends, he would have a little more red wine than he needed at Triggs Trap, located in what is now the Plumas–Eureka State Park Museum.

Late at night, Attilio would wander his way through town down Main Street, singing his Italian operas. From time to time, he would pound his chest with his fists and shout: "I'm a BIG MAN!" He would repeat this several times, then return to singing opera. We could hear him pass behind our cabin near the church, then he'd continue along a well-worn path to his "cabin" behind the cemetery, on the edge of the dump trench/canyon. To let the town know he had arrived home, he'd shoot his gun.

Sequel no. 2, by **James White**, a descendant of a longtime Johnsville family

In the summer of 1948, when I was only eight years old, I was invited by my uncle and aunt, Samuel and Ora White, to spend the summer with them at their home in Johnsville. I jumped at the chance, for I loved spending time in the peaceful village of Johnsville in my uncle and aunt's house.

Uncle Samuel was the postmaster for Johnsville and would travel to Blairsden every day to pick up the mail.

As a courtesy, he would offer Attilio a ride to Blairsdén once a week so he could do his grocery shopping. On one of these trips, Attilio asked me if I would like to practice target shooting with his 22-caliber rifle.



You can imagine the excitement I was feeling at such an invitation.

Of course I would love to practice shooting Attilio's 22 rifle!

I was given permission by my Uncle Samuel, and then Attilio and I would spend many an afternoon at his cabin behind the Johnsville cemetery firing the 22 rifle at empty half-gallon glass wine jugs. This activity continued throughout a summer I will never forget.

After Attilio's passing in 1956, when I was 16 years old, I was notified Attilio had left his 188g Winchester 22 rifle to me in his last will and testament.

James White and the Winchester

It's Time to Renew Your Annual JHS Membership

This is the time of year when most JHS memberships are due for renewal. We wouldn't be able to continue our volunteer work without your subscription fees to help cover JHS project expenses. Please send a check made out to JHS, along with your name and email address, to:

Johnsville Historical Society
260 Colfax Avenue
Grass Valley, California 95945

Annual membership fees:

- ◆ **\$25 Individual**
- ◆ **\$50 Family**
- ◆ **\$100 Patron**
- ◆ **\$150 Business**
- ◆ **\$250 Founder**

If you'd like to give the gift of membership to a family member or friend, please send a check to

JHS along with the gift recipient's name and email address. If you're not sure whether it's time to renew your membership, or you have other questions, email Kim Zwick at ktzwick5@gmail.com. Thank you!



Deciphering the Mysteries of the Woodward Drawings *(continued from page 3)*

The state of California hopes to create an Interpretive Project Plan to bring together stories, photos, artifacts, and research about the mill into a single planning document, which would include the Woodward drawings. The plan would educate the public about the mill's rich history and the story of mining in the Johnsville region. In turn, this would help raise public awareness about the goal of funding a complete restoration of the mill.

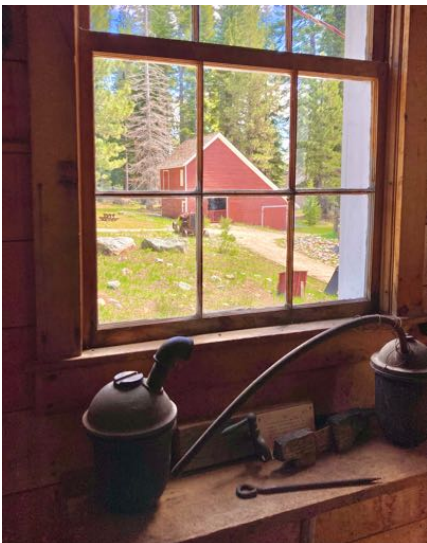
Time—and the efforts of many—will tell if the effort succeeds.

*Editor's Note: The Johnsville Historical Society is grateful for the generous \$1,500 grant received by **The Common Good Community Foundation** in Plumas County, commongoodplumas.org, which will support the restoration of two Woodward drawings.*

If you would like to make a donation to support the Woodward drawings restoration project, please contact Kim Zwick by sending an email to: ktzwick5@gmail.com.



Mohawk Stamp Mill in June 2022



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