

JOHNSVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRING/SUMMER 2024

EST. 1984

A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO PRESERVING THE GOLD-MINING HISTORY OF JOHNSVILLE, CALIFORNIA



A SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR OF JOHNSVILLE

During this year's Gold Discovery Days festival on July 20 and 21, JHS offers visitors a free nine-stop walking tour of town highlights. p. 4

NEW JOHNSVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY FACEBOOK PAGE

We hope you'll "Like" us and become a follower of JHS events and announcements. We also want to share your historical photos. p. 6

REPLACING JOHNSVILLE'S OLD WATER TANKS

Out with the old, in with the new: Installation of two steel water tanks begins this summer and is expected to be completed this fall. p. 7

Johnsville Historical Society's Treasured Collection: Now Available Online

For many decades, it has been the goal of the Johnsville Historical Society (JHS) to find a way—and the funding—to post its extensive collection of photographs and other historical documents on an online platform, providing anyone with a computer or cell phone access to the treasured collection at any time. p. 2

JOHNSVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S TREASURED COLLECTION: NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE

BY MITCHELL OLSON AND KATIE AGNEW

For many decades, it has been the goal of the Johnsville Historical Society (JHS) to find a way—and the funding—to post its extensive collection of photographs and other historical documents on an online platform, providing anyone with a computer or cell phone access to the treasured collection at any time.

That goal has reached a major milestone.

Posting the documents online also would preserve the historical collection forever, an especially important goal since the originals could be damaged or destroyed by a fire or excess moisture.

In 2020, the JHS board of directors finally had the resources to hire an intern to get the huge project underway. Jordan Zwick, the daughter of long-time Johnsville residents, was hired for the job; she carefully scanned each document and photo in the vast JHS historical collection and downloaded the files into a retrievable database. She completed the job in fall 2022, and today the JHS database holds 2,248 documents, photographs, and artifacts.

In July 2023, JHS took the next significant step and filed an application with California Revealed, a nonprofit California State Library initiative that helps public libraries, archives, museums, historical societies, and other heritage groups



Longboard skiers in Johnsville. Photo date unknown.



Johnsville residents John and Rose Peirano.
Photo date unknown.

digitize, preserve, and provide online access to archival materials documenting the state's histories, arts, and cultures. California Revealed also provides access and preservation services to organizations with existing digital collections. Their goal is to expand the historical narrative of California by collaborating with regional organizations, including historical societies.

As a part of the application process, JHS submitted 125 photographs to California Revealed to gauge the organization's interest in the collection. The response: Many of the scanned photographs were rejected because they were not of acceptable quality. So, many hours were spent by the JHS board members and other volunteers rotating, enlarging, sharpening, and cropping the submitted

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THE WOMAN BEHIND THE JHS COLLECTION

BY DAVID DAUN

In the early 1900s, a woman named Helena Josephine Navone made a trip from Napa County, California, to the sleepy village of Johnsville, California. Helena suffered from allergies, so on the advice of her doctor, she sought the clean and clear air of the Sierra Nevada mountains. Why she chose the remote location of Johnsville has been lost to history.

But what she found in the historic gold-mining town of Johnsville was a slice in time of the latter half of the 1800s.

A self-proclaimed history nerd, Helena fell in love with Johnsville and carved out a life for herself in this remote gold-mining ghost town.

Johnsville was full of beautiful buildings left over from the gold-mining days and one that caught her eye was the old St. John's Catholic Church (previously known as the Johnsville Mission Church, and today it's the headquarters of the Johnsville Historical Society). She loved the church so much she started a movement in 1940 to restore the structure. She circulated collection boxes and posted large signs asking for donations to fund the church's restoration—a project that would last until the year 2000, when the restoration was finally completed by the community of Johnsville and various volunteers. (Around this time she also fell in love with Johnsville resident A. Robert Pini and married him in 1944.)

Helena's passion for historic preservation did not stop with the church. When the mining industry came to an end, the mining buildings and Johnsville's residences were gradually abandoned. Since it was considered too much of a hassle to move the contents of these buildings, nearly everything was left behind by the miners and their families. Helena decided the abandoned artifacts were too valuable to leave unprotected, so she collected and stored as much as she could in her barn.

When Helena passed away in 1988 at age 86, she was buried in the Johnsville Cemetery next to her husband (look for the black granite Pini memorial headstone), and her relatives donated the historic artifacts she collected to the Johnsville Historical Society (JHS). Because of her foresight, JHS has an extensive and incredibly unique view into the lives of the gold-mining community that occupied Johnsville dating from the 1849 Gold Rush to the 1920s, when the mining industry came to an end in this remote part of Northern California.



One of the signs posted by Helena Navone during her crusade to restore the church in Johnsville in the mid-1900s.

A SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR OF JOHNSVILLE DEBUTS ON JULY 20 AND 21

BY BRUCE MACGREGOR

The Johnsville Historical Society (JHS) is pleased to introduce the first self-guided walking history tour of Johnsville. The nine-stop walking tour, developed in coordination with the Plumas-Eureka State Park Association, will be launched during this year's [Gold Discovery Days](#) festival on July 20 and 21.

With the aid of an easy-to-follow step-by-step map, the public can visit nine locations important to Johnsville's Gold Rush history; in front of each mapped destination an

illustrated poster (as shown below) will be mounted on sandwich boards. These boards will feature images and stories about the miners, merchants, and hoteliers who lived in the area in its heyday.

The self-guided walking tour will begin at the church in Johnsville, which now serves as the JHS headquarters, and from there the historical highlights can be viewed in any order. Next year, the walking tour will be expanded to include additional historic sites.

On July 20 and 21, visitors may pick up a free walking-tour map at the Johnsville church/JHS headquarters or in the nearby Plumas-Eureka State Park Museum. (Please note the popular Gold Discovery Days' horse-drawn wagon will offer rides to visitors from the park museum to the church and back on one day only this year: Saturday, July 20.)

JHS's rich photo collection, combined with collections from the Plumas County Museum and other facilities, provide a fascinating glimpse of Johnsville during the Gold Rush era. Stay tuned for additional walking tour dates by reading the JHS newsletter (please subscribe if you're not already a JHS member; see page 9) or by following JHS on its [new Facebook page](#) (see the article on page 6).

If you own a historic home in Johnsville, perhaps linked to a family who lived there in the 19th century, JHS would love to hear your story and will consider adding it to the self-guided tour. Please contact JHS by sending an email to: johnsvillegold@gmail.com.



A NINE-STOP TOUR OF JOHNSVILLE

The inaugural self-guided walking tour of Johnsville features photographs and stories about nine important buildings and topics unique to this area. On July 20 and 21, visitors may pick up a free, easy-to-follow map at the Johnsville church/JHS headquarters or in the Plumas-Eureka State Park Museum and follow it to these attractions:

- [St. John's of the Mountains Catholic Church](#)
- [How Johnsville Got Its Name](#)
- [The Mitchell-White House](#)
- [Richard and Maggie White's House](#)
- [The Johnsville Hotel](#)
- [The Johnsville Firehouse](#)
- [Main Street, Johnsville, Before 1892](#)
- [The Johnsville Mercantile Store \(The Iron Door Restaurant\)](#)
- [The George Woodward House](#)





NEW JOHNSVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY FACEBOOK PAGE

BY MITCHELL OLSON

The Johnsville Historical Society is pleased to announce its new Facebook page: [Johnsville Historical Society - JHS](#).

We hope you'll take a look and "Like" us—and become a follower of JHS.

Important Note! An old Facebook page called "Johnsville Historical Society" is still on this social media channel, but it's no longer maintained (for complicated reasons); while we try to get the old Facebook page deleted, please make sure you're going to our new Facebook page with "— JHS" posted at the end of our name: **Johnsville Historical Society - JHS**.

JHS events and announcements will be posted regularly on this new Facebook page, as well as images ranging from gold miners' personal wedding photos and other family scenes from the early 19th century to current shots of Johnsville's abundant wildlife and majestic scenery.

To set up a free Facebook account, go to [Facebook.com](#).

If you'd like to share some of your personal family photos from Johnsville—particularly photos, letters, or other documents of historical interest—please email them to JHS at johnsvillegold@gmail.com. We'd love to consider them for future posts on the new JHS Facebook page.



REPLACING JOHNSVILLE'S OLD WATER TANKS

BY MITCHELL OLSON

Since the 1970s, two redwood tanks holding 88,000 gallons of water each have supplied Johnsville residents and the Plumas-Eureka State Park; one tank has been used primarily for water service and the other has been reserved for fire protection. Over the years, the tanks have degraded, resulting in increased water leakage. In 2015, the Johnsville Public Utility District (JPUD) was notified the tanks need to be replaced. Since then, JPUD board members have been working on a plan to replace the old tanks and raise funds to cover the costs.

In April 2022, JPUD received grant funding to cover most of the costs of two new steel water tanks—each with a 100,000-gallon capacity. Installation of the tanks begins this summer and is expected to be completed this fall.

Residents may receive new water-use conservation rules during the installation process, as water storage levels will fluctuate while the new tanks are being installed.

For updates on this project, please visit johnsvillepud.org and click on "The Home Front."



One of the two redwood water-supply tanks in Johnsville slated for replacement this year. [John A. Negedly](#) (1914-2006), a former California State Senator and long-time Johnsville resident, was instrumental in securing the funding to build and install the wooden water tanks more than 50 years ago.

FOR SALE: \$500 OR BEST OFFER FOR ANTIQUE TOLEDO COOKSTOVE

Alas, JHS no longer has the storage space for this antique wood-fired Toledo Cookstove, which was used by an Italian gold-mining family in Johnsville in the early 1900s, then it was passed down to other Johnsville residents before it was donated to JHS. The famous Toledo Cooker Co. was based in Toledo, Ohio, and manufactured cooking products as of about 1915.

If you're interested in purchasing this antique treasure, please email JHS at johnsvillegold@gmail.com. The suggested price is \$500, but it will be sold to the highest bidder.

Please note, the buyer will need to arrange for transportation of the cookstove, which is currently stored in the Johnsville church/JHS headquarters.



PLEASE SUPPORT JHS

The nonprofit Johnsville Historical Society (JHS) could not continue to preserve its fragile and extensive Gold Rush collection, as well as the Johnsville church building and surrounding trees, without your help. Please become a JHS member—or renew your annual membership—or make a tax-deductible donation by sending a check made out to JHS, along with your name and email address, to:

Johnsville Historical Society
P.O. Box 1458
Graeagle, California 96103

Annual membership fees:

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

If you'd like to give the gift of membership to a family member or friend, please mail a check to JHS along with the gift recipient's name and email address. If you have membership questions, email us at johnsvillegold@gmail.com.

JHS is a 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Public Benefit Corporation and all gifts and donations are tax deductible. Thank you. We greatly appreciate your support.



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JOHNSVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S TREASURED COLLECTION: NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE

photographs and adding required metadata (data that describes and provides information about the image, such as the file size and the date the file was created) to each photograph.

The 125 improved photographs were re-submitted to California Revealed in late 2023.

In January 2024, the good news arrived: All 125 photographs were accepted and JHS is now an official Contributing Organization of California Revealed. Samples of the accepted photos are featured at right, and on pages 1, 2, 3, and 12.

On February 3, 2024, JHS's photographs—including images of Eureka Mills, Jamison Mine, Main Street, Mohawk Stamp Mill, and many of Johnsville's early settlers—were uploaded and are now viewable on the California Revealed website; go to californiarevealed.org/group/286697. (An account is not required to view the online collection.)

California Revealed collections are also discoverable through the Digital Public Library of America and other widely used archives, offering multiple access points for potential users, including teachers, genealogists, artists, scholars, and journalists.

In June, JHS submitted another application to California Revealed with more images from its collection. Progress on this project will be shared in future JHS newsletters.

JHS is grateful to Megan Lohnash and Natalie Martinez at California Revealed for their technical help and assistance in making this project a success. And this accomplishment never would have happened without the technical guidance and recommendations of Jay Shellen, a JHS volunteer, and JHS's former intern, Jordan Zwick, who spent many months developing the initial JHS database.

Learn more about California Revealed at californiarevealed.org.

To help support the next phase of the JHS digitization project, please consider making a monetary donation by sending a check to: **Johnsville Historical Society, P.O. Box 1458, Graeagle, CA 96103.**

Johnsville in winter. Circa 1902.



One of three general stores in Johnsville. Early 1900s.



The original wooden bridge to Johnsville. Circa 1880.



JOHNSVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD MEMBERS

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The Mohawk Stamp Mill stands tall during the Gold Rush era. This mining area was known as Eureka Mills in the 1850s. Today, the region is called Plumas-Eureka State Park and portions of the stamp mill may still be seen.

Photo from the Johnsville Historical Society collection; date unknown.

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