Nineteenth Century Americans celebrated the season with the same traditions and yule festivities as we do today.

Yet, away from the more civilized life “back-east”, gold miners, idlers and merchants, holed-up in towns, cabins & huts in the California foothills, often endured a brutal and meager existence; thus many looked forward to the arrival of the Christmas Holiday.

Steadfast soldiers could be heard caroling at their outposts as the smell of roasting venison wafted upon the winds.

Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote of the preparations for Christmas: “Ma was busy all day long. She baked a cake, vinegar pies and dried-apple pies and she let Laura and Mary lick the cake spoon.”

"That very Christmas”, Laura was delighted to find a shiny new tin cup, a peppermint candy, a heart shaped cake, and a brand new penny in her stocking. In those days, these small items were a wealth of gifts to the young girl.”
Though perhaps modest, most folks made every attempt to decorate their cabins for the holidays with what-ever natural materials looked attractive at the bleakest time of year, such as evergreens, pinecones, holly, nuts, and berries.

For some, there might even be a Christmas tree, plain, or gaily decorated with homemade ornaments. Many gold rush huts were too small to accommodate a tree and a “communal tree” might serve, if such a tree could be found at all.

Lucky were those with the means to conjure up a feast; bringing out preserved fruits and vegetables, and fresh meat if available. Those with know-how may scrape together the necessities for a much anticipated plum pudding. Homemade gifts, often hand-carved, or practical items of knitted scarves, hats, mitts and socks were treasures indeed.

Christmas Eve found many a home-sick miner spending a lonely vigil without the benefit of festivities, most likely thinking of loved-ones back in the “states”.

On Christmas Day some would attend church, indoors if available, or outside in the elements with a self-ordained preacher, then spend the day visiting with friends in neighboring claims. Others would take their pan into an icy creek in hopes of shaking out a real Christmas Nugget.

Edited from: *Legends of America*, by Kathy Weiser LC

### Pioneer Vinegar Pie

1 egg  
1 heaping tablespoon flour  
1 c sugar  
1 Tsp sharp vinegar  

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Beat these ingredients together and add 1 tablespoon of sharp vinegar and a cup of cold water. Flavor with a little nutmeg and pour into an unbaked pie shell. Cover with second pie crust, or not and flute edges. Bake for an hour.
“Think out of the box, be flexible, change to meet the need.” With an eye on the future, Chief Ranger Matt Green opened the gathering of representatives from Sierra District Cooperating Associations on Oct. 8th at the historic Empire Mine Clubhouse. Building on momentum of the 2015 session and Assn. workshops at the Department’s Training Center, a “Year in review” followed with each entity identifying a Success and Challenge in their respective domains.

FNBMD Director Dave Anderson highlighted the on-going development of a Strategic Plan for Malakoff Diggins and the pending installation of solar power arrays. “Challenges” noted potential and existing mud slides and the major threat to the park’s historic structures due to Deferred Maintenance. Chief Ranger Green discussed the processes by which Assn.’s may help in the pursuit of state funds, both in-house and via elected officials & private entities.

To the need for a Go-To place to enhance communications between the associations and DPR, up and down the line and across the lines, Sierra District Superintendent Marilyn Linkem introduced Lisa McQuick and Christina Jeromey from the new Office of Partnership, which has been opened in Sacramento for that purpose. A lively discussion with Lisa and Christina examined many communications frustrations and how this new office may be of service.

Chief Ranger Green, Supervising Ranger Youngren and Sierra District Maintenance Chief Ron Hansen led an spirited and comprehensive discussion on Project Planning, delving into the many levels of bureaucracy, legal requirements, reviews and paperwork, ad nausuem; that must be attended for such endeavors. Indeed, after the meeting, many folks moaned at the perilous maze of “BUREAUCRACY”, however, the courses of that maze are now much more apparent.

Additional sessions on Fund Raising and Membership plus items that “popped up” were followed at the end of the day, by a Mixer courtesy of EMPA and tended by costumed Docents.

A full day for persistent prognosticators, predicting only pleasant surprises. L. Clark - Editor
Mark Twain at Lake City, Briefly

July 9, 1863

I came by the Henness Pass route. I don't like it. I brought my other shirt along, and they charged me extra baggage. Besides, Uncle John Atchison, Mr. Harris and Mr. Chapelle were in the party, and they created a famine at every station we stopped at. They fell upon the Barnum Restaurant in Sacramento, and ate the proprietor out of house and home; then they attacked the first station this side of Lincoln, and brought ruin and desolation upon it. I am a mighty responsible artist at a dinner-table myself, when I get a chance - but I never got one until we arrived at Lake City, on Wednesday evening. We met the down stage there, with five or six men in it who were considerably battered and bruised by a recent upset. They were unable to eat. But the landlord lost nothing by it - I disposed of those extra rations. One man among the wounded was seriously hurt, a Mr. Tomlinson, from Humboldt Bay, shoulder dislocated. We seventeen passengers however, traveled to Nevada (city) then to Tracy’s without fear of accident - as our driver was the best in the world. They gave us a fish breakfast at Hunter's, on the Truckee - trout, Uncle John said but it was hardly tender enough for that - I expect it was whale. We dashed by the Ophir (NV) on Thursday morning at half-past eleven, 29 hours out from Sacramento. (Italics Mine LC)

Twain surely was referring to the Virginia Turnpike as the “Henness Pass route”, as it runs from Lincoln to Bridgeport, French Corral, then cuts off, up the ridge to Lake City; (Note the various stage routes on the Broadside.) Twain caught the “down stage” at Lake City where it arrived from N. Bloomfield, Moores Flat, Woolsey’s, etc. He rode it “down” to Nevada City and east, likely up the now, Hwy 20 ridge, past 5 Mile House, down Washington Rd., across the S. Yuba River, up Gaston Rd., and Meadow Lakes Rd. to Tracy’s Station (Near Jackson Meadows) by Henness Pass Rd. Then, on to Hunter’s Station on The Truckee River between Verdi and Reno, (Big Meadow), then down past “The Ophir” mine near Carson City. L. Clark, Editor
With the Environmental Reports and Impact Statements complete, the presence of surveyors will soon be obvious to park visitors, staff and wildlife, as they ply their trade in North Bloomfield. The work is in preparation for the installation of a Solar Platform behind the old Jeffers’ Barn, across North Bloomfield Road from Blair Pond.

Chief Ranger Matt Green hopes to have the contract encumbered by the end of this (16/17) Fiscal Year. A 30 KW array with designed future expansion to 60 KW will gather sun energy to operate the park’s electrical plant. The less efficient diesel generators will remain in place for emergency and maintenance back up.

Note the laser target atop the tripod. These are upscale surveyors with modern equipment. No more dragging chain cross-country.  
Go Bears!

Jeffers’ House & Barn
During the gold rush, the grizzly bear and elk were the two largest animals found in California. The grizzly is confined to the regions west of the Rocky mountains, and was once found throughout the Sierras, foot-hills, and Coast Ranges. In early days, these giant bears were very numerous, but by the late 1800s became comparatively scarce and seldom were seen or molested any man. During that first wave of the gold rush pioneers however, there were many desperate fights between the grizzly and hunters. Their great size, strength, and vicious nature rendered them a most formidable enemy to the prospector. During the early days of California there were many of them to be found in the Coast Ranges within a few hours travel of San Francisco, and generally throughout the timber portion of the State. Normally their chief diet was berries and herbs.

Near the El Dorado county line a Grizzly bear had been seen several times and was known to frequent a patch of thick chaparral. As was the wont in those times, a party of ten or twelve miners, among whom were the Johnstons, Jim and Jack, started out to find him. They succeeded in getting a fatal shot at his majesty the bear, which contrary to all expectation, retreated into the thick brush. From the amount of blood along his trail they judged that he was too severely wounded to be dangerous, and they imprudently followed him. The infuriated animal charged upon the Johnstons, who were foremost, and brought one of them to the ground, his gun during the encounter being thrown out of reach.

The other fired when the opportunity presented itself to do so without endangering his brother’s life, again wounding the bear, which left the first one to pursue the other. It does not seem that they succeeded in loading again, but each endeavored to draw the bear away from the other by pounding him over the head with the gun, when the animal would get the other down and commence again gnawing his arms, head and body. It was a desperate fight now to get away. The balance of the hunting party had deserted them at the first sight of the animal when he made his charge, leaving the two to their fate. Jack’s arms were now so useless from the repeated crushings, that he could no longer raise them.
The struggle seemed hopeless, but at the last moment the bear, becoming exhausted or subdued by his severe wounds, gave a kind of snarl and began beat a retreat. One of the men was now utterly helpless and the other one not much better; he however, succeeded in dragging his brother out of the brush to the open ground. He was taken away in a wagon and cared for, and recovered after several months. The crippled hand and arm, and terrible scars all over his person, attest the severity of the contest. After their recovery they revisited the place. They found the skeleton of the bear, which was of unheard-of dimensions.

Stories of bears weighing fifteen hundred pounds, to those who have seen only the bears of two or three hundred pounds weight, which frequent the mountains of the Eastern States; bears of such size may seem utterly absurd. Making allowance for the exaggerations natural under some circumstances, there can be no doubt of their occasionally reaching to a monstrous size thus striking terror into folks in the vicinity. 

*Source: California Gold Rush: True Tales of the Forty Niners. Hunting the Fearsome California Grizzly Bear*

Though Grizzlies are gone from California, take care in the wilds of Wyoming, Idaho Montana, Alaska and Canada; not to meet one up close. Ed.

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**American Black Bear**  
*Ursus Americanus*  

**Bigger**  
**Grizzly Bear**  
*Ursus Arctos Horiiibilllis*

**Meaner**  
**Deadlier**

Black Bears may also be Brown, Gray, Red, White or a combination of Colors  

Black Bears can tear you up if provoked or threatened.  
(Such as: Disputing a garbage can.)

Over the Years many well-intentioned and/or foolish people trying to commune in close proximity to Grizzlies, have been killed and some have been feasted upon. Ed.
Kicking Off a Renewed Partnership

Supervising Ranger Dan Youngren facilitated a Project Walk-through with Sector Maintenance Chief Julie Clark and ECV Humbug, Tyler Souter. The goal was to kick off a new cooperative agreement for Clamper participation in construction and repair of designated projects in the park.

First on the list is repair and re-shingling of the roof over the Barbershop porch. The second phase is to renovate the special event cook shack located next to the Skidmore House.

This much-needed job entails the installation of Stainless Steel counter tops and storage racks. The projects are expected to be completed by the New Year.

2017 Volunteers

Off-season is upon us and although the park is open there will seldom be staff available in the visitor center or museum. Visitor Service there should resume in Spring 2017, along with preparations for the Kid’s Fishing Derby, the Environmental Living Program, School Group Tours, Town Tours, Humbug Day, etc. Potential State Park Volunteers may call Seasonal Interpretive Specialist Debbie Pfanner: 530-265-2740. debora.pfanner@parks.ca.gov

Please specify your desire to volunteer at: Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park.

Rock Creek Diggings

From: The Diary of a 49er, by Alfred T. Jackson, Edited by C.L. Canfield

August 1850. I was told that the people living round Caldwell’s Store on Deer Creek held a meeting and called the place Nevada City.

February 10, 1852. Over on the other side of the river, at Humbug, they have struck some good diggings and quite a large mining camp has sprung up. It is a loose quartz gravel, easily washed, and they say that there are immense beds of it covering three or four miles down the ridge. It doesn’t all pay; in fact, there are only a few spots rich enough to work, but there is a little gold through it all. If only there was some way to wash out big quantities of it cheaply, there is lots of gold to be taken out. (Within a few months, Miller, Chabot and Matteson were cobbling together the first hydraulic mining water cannons at Red Dog. Ed.)
Open the front or back door of the Skidmore House, built in 1862, and you peer down a long hallway, with rooms off to each side, and gaze out into the yard.

Malakoff Unit History lists the place as a "Railroad Flat" or "Shotgun House. Skidmore, who arrived in Humbug in 1857 and went on to parlay bakery and saloon businesses into status as one of the leading citizens of the community, probably was more concerned with the actual raising of his “kit” house, (forerunner of “pre-fabricated” buildings) than debating style.

Kit houses originated in the south, especially New Orleans, where they could be somewhat mass produced in either of the arguable styles which were the most popular type of houses there from the 1860s thru the 1920s. The designs would certainly have migrated west during the California gold rush.

A true shotgun house consists of a series of in-line rooms connected by common doorways, thus the saying that a shotgun could be fired into the front and out the back without hitting anyone. There is no hallway.

A Railroad Flat, or Apartment has a series of rooms in a line. A hallway typically runs the length of the house, alongside each room, similar to the design of a railroad sleeping car.

Skidmore’s House would seem to be a combination of the two styles. (Experts may debate the finer points.)

The house was occupied by Skidmore and his descendants until the 1960s. In its early days it was known as one of the finer houses in N. Bloomfield. This despite drafts, poor heating, no indoor plumbing and an itinerant population of critters.

When traveling in the south, cast an eye upon some of the older, narrow, squat-looking homes and see if you can tell a “Shotgun” from a “Railroad” house.

Notice the door on the yellow house is on the left, suggesting a Railroad Flat design. This house is typically, 12 ft. wide as property taxes were often based on street frontage. The 2nd house has a door near the middle, appears to be a Shotgun variety, as does the Skidmore place. One would have to open the door to see what lurks behind. Maybe the Tommy-knockers know.

L. Clark, Ed.

The Dog that Ate Christmas
By Lt. Larry Clark (state park ranger retired)

In the early years of my career, before we had formal seniority on the job, Holiday coverage often, arbitrarily went to the “single guys”. And woe, if you were the only single guy handy. The married guys stayed home eating turkey with their families and watched football. Rather than running just his own park, the single guy had to flit from park to park to cover the whole sector. The thought of being the lone ranger for Christmas, every year, could make the single guy a bit cranky. To rub salt in the wound, the married guys would take on a condescending air and proclaim the unmarried guys were (by definition) irresponsible, thus deserving their fate.

In a somewhat warped way I determined to make my plight into a “Happy Holiday” by writing at least one citation for Christmas. I knew from experience that lawbreakers did not take holidays. First I went looking for irritating groups of smiling carolers. It was disappointing to learn caroling was not a violation, even if a few smiles were contrived.

Then came, “The Dog That Ate Christmas!” Argo was a magnificent Malamute. He also was devoid of discipline; a trait learned from his owner, John. He had been found romping at large in the park many times resulting in trips to doggie jail and numerous citations for John.

Once upon a Christmas morning a camping family had adorned their picnic table with a lace cloth, and a yule feast befitting the occasion. The family had just settled down for their holiday thanks, when out of the fog, Argo appeared at full gallop.

Up to the tabletop he sprang. Now children said daddy, it’s not a wolf. But wolf, Argo did, to that fine array. The slobbered cranberries, let out a squeal, fine meal.

Argo was finally captured in his favorite haunt, the park swamp. After loading this stinking, slurping pile of energy into my vehicle, I sought out John, who lived nearby. John ran through his usual whine of excuses ending with, “You’re not going to give me a ticket on Christmas?” I am, I said, if you don’t make good the damage Argo did to those folk’s Christmas dinner.

John paid the damages. The campers were able to assemble a Christmas dinner from what was probably the only market open on the north coast, and invited the “single guy” ranger to share it with them. 

Merry Christmas to All!
Bygone Winter at North Bloomfield

Think Snow

MIND THE WEATHER. IF WE GET LUCKY THIS WINTER, GRAB YOUR GALOSHES, TIRE CHAINS AND PACK A LUNCH FOR A DELIGHTFUL SNOW DAY IN THE PARK
FRIENDS OF NORTH BLOOMFIELD & MALAKOFF DIGGINS

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FRIENDS OF NORTH BLOOMFIELD & MALAKOFF DIGGINS
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

The Friends of North Bloomfield & Malakoff Diggins (FNB&MD) is a non-profit organization assisting the California Department of Parks and Recreation in the operation of Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park. Your tax-deductible membership in FNB &MD will

- help preserve, protect and enhance the man made and natural resources of Malakoff Diggins SHP
- support interpretation of the park’s rich biological diversity, geologic features, historic and cultural resources
- provide you with a quarterly newsletter and other notices of Park activities
- include a 10% discount on purchases from the Malakoff Park Store.

Membership Levels

☐ Annual Senior/Student ($15)
☐ Annual Individual membership ($20)
☐ Annual family membership ($35)
☐ Lifetime individual membership ($150)
☐ Lifetime family membership ($200)

Name________________________________________
Street Address________________________________________
City______________________________State__________Zip__________
Phone (home)___________________________(cell)___________________________

Email
I am interested in:
☐ helping the park organization financially
☐ becoming a trained docent
☐ becoming a park volunteer
☐ other

Mission:

*We enhance the interpretive experience for visitors, promote park-based education for learners of all ages, and support and preserve the natural and cultural resources of Malakoff Diggins SHP. We also assist other cooperative associations and the State Park System mission for the benefit of the public.*

for more information call 530.265.2740 or check out our website:
www.malakoffdigginsstatepark.org