

GUIDE TO THE MALAKOFF DIGGINS STATE HISTORIC PARK
PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

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Park History

Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park contains 3,143 acres of natural, cultural, and historical resources. Located in Nevada County, the park is bordered to the north, south, and east by Tahoe National Forest, bounded between San Juan Ridge and the South Fork of the Yuba River, and is roughly 13 miles northeast of Nevada City. The park is accessible by car via North Bloomfield-Graniteville Road.

Prior to the nineteenth-century mass migration of gold-seekers into the region, the area containing the present-day park was home to the Hill Nisenan for thousands of years. With territory once extending from the southern reaches of the Yuba, American, and Feather rivers to the eastern bank of the Sacramento River, the Hill Nisenan lived in a variety of seasonal locations and enjoyed the region's abundant plant and animal resources. Having lost a substantial portion of their population in the 1833 malaria outbreak, the Nisenan people suffered their greatest losses when gold-prospectors flooded into their territory after 1848, importing diseases, waging violent attacks, and stealing natural resources. Today, the surviving Nisenan live on the Nevada County Rancheria and work diligently to preserve their lifeways for future generations.

Within five years of James Marshall's gold discovery at Coloma, prospectors found gold at Humbug Creek, so named because subsequent attempts at placer mining there yielded no precious metals. However, in 1858, when prospectors once again struck gold at the location, the town expanded to incorporate adjacent sites—Lake City, Relief Hill, and North Columbia—and include a sawmill, saloons, and breweries. Dissatisfied with "Humbug," local residents desired a better name for their community. With "Bloomfield" already established in Sonoma County, they chose the name "North Bloomfield" for their settlement (**Figure 1**).

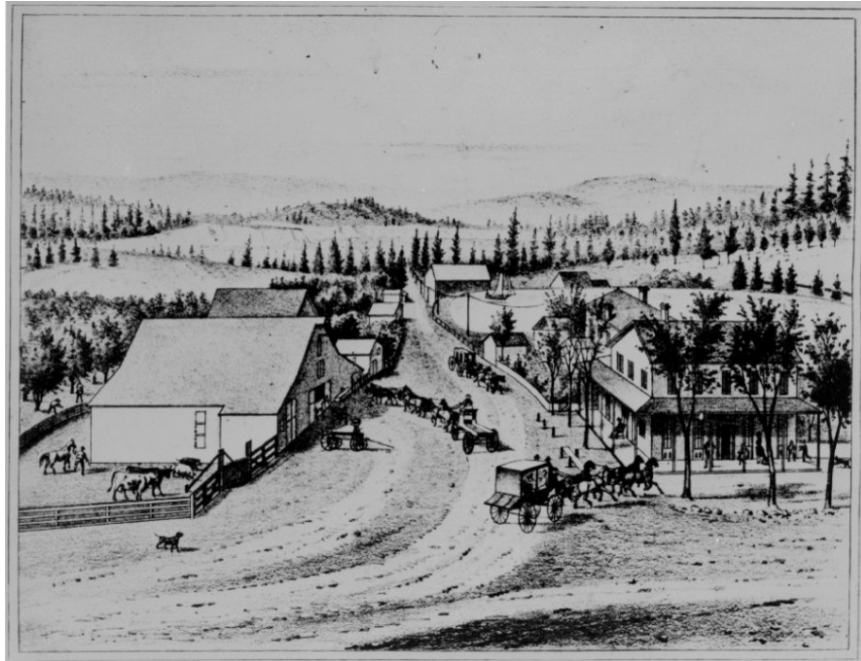


Figure 1. North Bloomfield, ca. 1880. Catalog # 090-10220.

In 1866, French immigrant Julius Poquillion purchased and consolidated many abandoned claims in the area around North Bloomfield. Backed by San Francisco investors, Poquillion formed the North Bloomfield Gravel Mining Company and established the largest hydraulic-mining operation in the state. Building over 100 miles of canals and ditches for water transport, the company processed roughly 100,000 tons of gravel per day. In 1876, the company employed seven full-scale Craig monitors—powerful water cannons—to scour ore from the mountainside and expose gold-laden quartz, as huge mounds of spent tailings washed into the river (**Figure 2**).



Figure 2. Hydraulic mining, ca. 1876. Catalog # 090-10234.

Hydraulic mining not only signaled an economic shift from small individual mining enterprises to large company operations, but also a dramatic increase in the industry's destructive environmental effects. As debris tailings from hydraulic operations washed downstream, they clogged waterways, raised river levels, and flooded adjacent farms. By the 1880s, neighboring agricultural communities had suffered decades of destruction and sought legal protection. In September 1882, Edward Woodruff, a landowner in the recently flooded town of Marysville, filed suit in *Woodruff v. North Bloomfield Gravel Mining Company*. In January 1884, Judge Lorenzo Sawyer handed down one of the first environmental rulings in the United States. The Sawyer Decision, as it has become known, ordered a permanent injunction against dumping debris into the Yuba River. The era of hydraulic mining in California was over.

With the company's demise, North Bloomfield's population, which had risen to 1,200 in the early 1880s, fell to 730 by 1900. Over the next few decades, most of the buildings were demolished for lumber, and by 1950, less than 20 residents lived in the former town. But beginning in the 1960s, Nevada County locals pushed to preserve what remained of the historic built environment, and, in 1964, the State of California began acquiring parcels in and around the former mining site; it classified the property a state historic park the following year.

California State Parks, coordinating with the Malakoff Diggins Park Association, preserves and interprets numerous historical, natural, and cultural resources at Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park (**Figures 3 and 4**). In addition to hydraulic-mining sites and restored and reconstructed buildings in the historic town of North Bloomfield, the park also features vast natural expanses and includes numerous camping and swimming facilities, over 20 miles of hiking trails, a visitor center and museum (open on weekends), and fishing areas for licensed anglers. The park is open for self-guided tours seven days a week from sunrise to sunset, and for reserved guided tours on weekends.



Figure 3. North Bloomfield, October 22, 2009. Catalog # 090-P66490.



Figure 4. Malakoff Diggins valley mining area, October 22, 2009. Catalog # 090-P66495.

Scope and Content

The Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park Photographic Collection spans the years circa 1869-2015, with the bulk of the collection covering the years 1871-1876, 1890-1910, 1964-1969, 1987, 1995, 2009, and 2015. There is a total of 487 cataloged images, including 209 photographic prints, scans, and negatives, 165 35mm slides, and 113 born-digital images. Photographs originated primarily from California State Parks staff and historic photographer Carleton E. Watkins.

The collection includes a number of historic, previously published, scanned images captured by renowned photographer, Carleton E. Watkins. The images primarily depict the various hydraulic-mining infrastructure built by the North Bloomfield Gravel Mining Company as well as the region's natural scenery. Images include various waterfalls, the English and Bowman Waste dams, Malakoff and North Bloomfield hydraulic mines, and South Yuba Canyon. Also depicted are action views of hydraulic mining in process.

The collection also includes other historic images, some previously published and others unattributed. In addition to documenting the various components of the hydraulic-mining operation, these images also depict other built and natural features of the area. Landscape views include Humbug Canyon, Poorman's Creek, and Brush Dam. Additionally, these historic images also capture the town of North Bloomfield and include such buildings as the King's Saloon, Sam Bivens' Saloon, the Quitman Lodge, the Gaus Home, the Methodist church, and the local schoolhouse. Also depicted are group portraits and action views of local miners.

Contemporary images produced by California State Parks staff largely document the various built and natural features of the park. Images depict historically preserved company landscapes, such as the Malakoff Diggins mining area and the Blair Reservoir. The collection also documents the restored and reconstructed town of North Bloomfield,

featuring such buildings as the McKillican-Mobley Store, the town post office, the King's Saloon, the drug store, Saint Columcille's Catholic Church, the livery stable, the schoolhouse, a barn, and a house. Images also capture the town cemetery and the park's museum, as well as historic objects: a restored monitor ("the Hendy Giant"), a fire bell, a wagon, a boiler, and a canvas-pipe sewing machine.

Also depicted are various views of areas outside North Bloomfield and the mines. Images include aerial views of the park unit, as well as landscape views of nearby settlements, Lakeville, Graniteville, and Relief Hill. The images feature meadows, hills, ranches, and other buildings.

The collection also documents events held at the park. Events include the 1966 Dedication Ceremony—featuring various public officials, North Bloomfield residents, and the E Clampus Vitus historical society—as well as a hydraulic monitor demonstration performed in 1985 by volunteers for park visitors.

Related Collections

Alma Lavenson California Gold Rush Mining Towns, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Carleton E. Watkins Stereograph Collection, Huntington Library: Photo Archives.

E Clampus Vitus Archives, University of the Pacific.

Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park Collection, California State Parks Archives.

Mining Collection, UC Davis: Special Collections.

North Bloomfield Gravel Mining Co. Records, Huntington Library: Manuscripts Dept.

North Bloomfield Gravel Mining Company Records, UC Davis: Special Collections.

North Bloomfield Hydraulic Mine, Nevada County, CA, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Catalog Subject Search Terms

Aerial view

Bloomfield Dam

Bowman Waste Dam

Dedication Ceremony

English Dam

Graniteville

Group portrait

"The Hendy Giant"

Historic photograph

Humbug Canyon

Humbug Creek

Hydraulic mining

King's Saloon

Landscape view

Malakoff Diggins

Malakoff Mine

McKillican-Mobley Store

Miner(s)

Mining area

Monitor(s)

North Bloomfield
Portrait
Quitman Lodge
Relief Hill
South Yuba River
Visitor(s)