

WHAT TO DO WITH INCONVENIENT HISTORY?

In preparation for creating the Downtown Walking Tour Brochure, John Knox and I realized that so much of the information we had about a particular building or home was anecdotal or word of mouth and when we went to verify information in many cases we could not.



Power Mansion

We began a year long process of reading the newspapers, from 1852 to 1940, that are collected at the Placer County Archives. We read and took photos of articles relating to buildings, homes, and businesses in Auburn. We then compiled all the notes into a database that would eventually contain over 15,000 individual entries.

One item of particular interest was an article from November of 1887.

“A. Huntley’s new house is nearly finished. It is 42 x 42 in size and two stories in height and is a modification of the Eastlake style. There are ten rooms besides the bathroom. The rooms on the first floor are twelve feet in height and on the second floor eleven feet in height. All the rooms in the first story are supplied with fireplaces. Each room is furnished with gas pipes....”

For the time period this was an unusually large house. Because of the database and the way it was created it was an easy enough process to put in the search term “Huntley” and see what information came up. An entry from 1901 was a standout.

“The Power family will occupy the Huntley house.”

We all know the Power’s Mansion Inn. It is a lovely Bed and Breakfast in the heart of downtown Auburn. Didn’t we all think that the Power family of the Hidden Treasure Mine fortune built the house? All the memorabilia displayed in the Mansion is about the Mine and the Power family. The Inn’s

website states that the Mansion was built in 1884 by Harold T. Power from the gold mining fortune that came from the Hidden Treasure mine.

Therefore, with evidence from the database as a start, we went searching for the truth behind the Mansion's history. While newspaper accounts can be misleading and sometimes even absolutely wrong, deeds and tax assessment rolls are the Holy Grail for researchers.

From early maps we know that the Mansion occupies Lot 3 of Block 18 in the town of Auburn's official map. The tax assessments show the owner of Lot 3 Block 18 from 1875 until the 1890's is A. Huntley. In 1887, records show that Huntley owned about 1 ½ acres with the lot valued at \$700 and the improvements (house) valued at \$800. In 1888 Huntley owned the property but the improvements jump to \$2,800. The information fits nicely with the Placer Herald article about a new house for the Huntleys.

Searching out the facts in the article about the Power family moving into the Huntley house in 1901, we found in deed book 77 page 488 the following entry.

L. Huntley (Asahel's son) sale of house and lot on lot 3 block 18 to Harold T. Power

We were excited to discover this new information. Asahel Huntley was a very interesting character. He mined at Foresthill in the 1850's and managed a store there. He was the County Clerk in 1863 and an undersheriff in 1869. He was Sheriff from 1882 until 1886. According to his obituary he was "best known" for his search and capture of the notorious murderer Covarubia. He searched for 1 year and traveled over 3,000 miles to finally arrest Covarubia near the Grizzly Bear House in 1884. He was the Auburn postmaster for many years. He created the Huntley subdivision, was on the first Board of Trustees for the City of Auburn and helped organize the Placer County Bank.

Additionally we found, that while the Power family were indeed wealthy, the Hidden Treasure Mine made about 26 million dollars in 1884, something went awry with Harold's management of his finances and in 1913 he mortgaged the property. By 1917 he had lost the Mansion to foreclosure.

In 1920 Dr. John Gordon Mackay bought the property. He used the downstairs for his medical practice. The entire Mackay clan lived in the house and Bernice Hancock Mackay, the doctor's daughter-in-law lived there until 1982.

What great information to add to the Mansion's history. The gallant sheriff! The beloved small town doctor whose family lived there for over 60 years! We sent the documented new information, backed up with copies of the deeds and other relevant details to the owners expecting that they would welcome further fact based research into their building. Today, nearly 2 ½ years later, if you check the Inn's website it is still erroneous.

"In 1884, the Honorable Harold T. Power built a beautiful Victorian mansion for his family. The Mansion was built from a gold mining fortune that came from the Power family's Hidden Treasure mine."

I highly recommend the High Tea that is served at the Power's Mansion Inn. It is quite lovely. You might ask about Sheriff Huntley when you are there.

April McDonald, City Historian