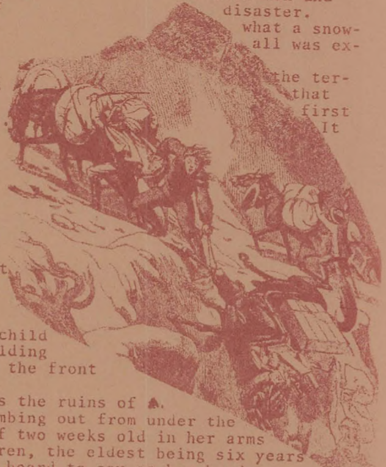
CATASTROPHY IN SIERRA CITY

One of the saddest catastrophes known happened here Friday afternoon, January 3rd, 1890, at 3:00 p.m.
A snowslide 150 feet wide precipatated from a bluff of rocks on the Sierra Buttes mountain just above the Buttes Company flume and did disastrous work to the upper part of town by sweeping away, without a seconds notice, people's homes and lives.
It was but a few minutes after the fatal slide came that everybody in the village knew what had happened. From every direction there could be seen men and women rushing to the scene of disaster. It is mountaineers who know what a snowslide means and consequently all was excitement.
It is impossible to describe the terrible scenes and sad pictures that met the eyes of those who first neared the place of the ruins. It was painful to the most hardened heart.



AT THE RUINS

The wife of William H. Buscombe was the first person to be seen. With her child in her arms she stood in front of her wrecked house crying for help.
As providence would have it, neither Mrs. Buscombe or her child were injured although the building was knocked several feet into the front yard.
A short distance from this was the ruins of A. Lewis' house. Mrs. Lewis climbing out from under the ruins with her infant child of two weeks old in her arms followed by three other children, the eldest being six years old. The first thing she was heard to say as her head appeared above the snow was, "We're all right". It is certainly a miracle how this lady and her children escaped. The house is a total wreck. There would have been no chance for them whatever had they not been in the kitchen which was on the east side of the house.
The saddest of the sad spectacles was yet to be unearthed. When the awful avalanche came, there sat by the fireside at her home Mrs. John Rich, surrounded by her four children and her niece, *Amelia Ryan of Downieville.*

In a moment the poor mother and all the others were swept into eternity by the great mass of snow that gave away from the mountain side, a mile above them. There was not a whole piece of board left after the snow struck the house. Most of the wreck was found below the road several rods distant. The body of Mrs. Rich was found close to where the sitting room stood and she still had her knitting in her hand.

Close to her lay the bodies of her daughter, Etta, son, Bertie, and her niece, Amelia Ryan. The body of Gertie, the youngest child, was found the following morning covered with snow and debris below the road.

Another fearful scene was at the place of Judge I. T. Mooney, just a few feet from the Rich scene. The wife and daughter of Mr. Mooney were at home when the slide came. The house was completely demolished. Men were at work trying to rescue the unfortunate women. After a few minutes, smoke began to rise from the debris showing that a fire had started, which added double horror to the terrible situation. The stricken husband gave up all hope of saving his loved ones and his moans could be heard a long distance as he left the smouldering wreck.

The fire was finally extinguished, but it was not until about dark that the bodies were found. Ethel had evidently been reclining on the lounge as she was found pinned to it face downward, and from all appearances was killed instantly. Her mother, Mrs. Mooney, was found near her and had suffered probably but little. Both of them were more or less burned but those who found them say that life was extinct before the fire reached them.

Thus seven persons were in a moment ushered into another world by a snowslide that occured in Sierra City. The following are their names and ages;

Annie E. Mooney, beloved wife of Judge I. T. Mooney, aged 51 yrs.
Ethel Florence Langton, Stepdaughter of Judge I. T. Mooney, aged 36 years.
Mrs. J. Rich, age 51 years, 21 days
Etta Rich, age 18 years
Bertie Rich, age 12 years
Gertrude Rich, age 6 years
Amelia Ryan, age 14 years

THE FUNERAL

Sunday was a sunshiny but sorrowful day for Sierra City. It was the day that six of the dead ones were taken to their last

resting places.

The funeral was set for 2:00 o'clock. When the bell began to toll, a sad sight was seen. A procession headed by men carrying four caskets passed out of the Good Templars Hall and marched to the Methodist Church. These caskets contained the bodies of Mrs. Rich and her three children. On nearing the church and at the Masonic Hall, another procession headed by two more caskets made the sight still sadder. In the latter caskets were the bodies of Mrs. I. T. Mooney and her daughter Ethel. The six caskets were placed in a row near the pulpit in the church. Services were then held over the dead ones, consisting of prayer by Joel Champion and singing by the choir. This over, men carrying the six bodies in the lead and followed by a procession a quarter of a mile long started for the cemetery on the hill.

At the grave, services were held over Mrs. Langton by the Golden Bar Parlor Native Daughters of the Golden West, of which order she was a faithful member. Prayer was then offered over Mrs. Mooney by Joel Champion. At the same time the Good Templars were holding services over the unfortunate Rich family. Almost every person in town attended the funerals. It was a dreadful thing to see six persons taken to their graves in one day in a little village like this. The seventh victim, Amelia Ryan, was taken to Downieville Tuesday to be buried.

THE SLIDE"S COURSE AND PROPERTY DESTROYED

The fatal snow slide started at a large bluff of rocks above the Sierra Buttes flume and at a point about a quarter of a mile east of the center of Sierra City. The altitude of the place is about 1200 feet above the road leading to Sierra Valley. A large ravine is at the point of starting, in which the snow lay to the depth of thirty feet. This started the slide; and rushing down the steep mountain, it gained immense volume and velocity. The slide is what is termed a lightning slide, differing from slides by moving bodily down the mountain instead of taking a round form and bounding as a ball does. It followed the ravine until it reached a flat 400 feet above the road. At this point the accumulated snow caused it to take a turn and make directly for the upper part of town. Right back of Mr. Mooney's residence it was again turned to almost a right angle caused by a small hollow, and it then broke for the Busch flat, the last of it reached James Noblet's house and the Catholic Church, causing the remains of the structure to rest again at Louis Trompetto's house.

The buildings totally destroyed were:
I. T. Mooney's residence

John Rich residence
A. Lewis residence
Catholic Church
The buildings more or less destroyed were:
W. H. Buscombe residence
J. Heitz residence
James Noblet residence
W. B. Morrish residence

There probably never was a village of this size thrown into such a panic as Sierra City on this occasion and a dark cloud rests over this unfortunate place to this day. Over two dozen families from that portion of town left their homes as soon as the avalanche occurred to seek shelter in the center of town where less damage was apprehended.

It continued to snow throughout Friday night. Great fear was entertained on every hand that other slides would come down the high mountain that lies above us and wipe out the entire town. But on Saturday morning the sun came out bright and warm, which brought gladness to every heart. A continuance of pleasant weather has caused the snow to settle and not much fear will be felt until the clouds again hover over us.

Everybody held out a helping hand of assistance to the bereaved ones who have lost all by the disaster, but there is one above all whose noble heartedness and in hard labor in this critical time will never be forgotten by the people in general of Sierra City as well as the afflicted. It is William H. James, Superintendent of the Sierra Buttes Mine. We believe it safe to say that this gentleman hardly slept an hour for three days and nights but labored day and night doing what was necessary to be done in such instances.

A collection was taken up among the citizens for the Rich family. $152.50 was secured in a short time. The county also allowed $100.00, making the total $252.50.

THE STORM

Up to the day of the disaster, it had snowed just five weeks almost steadily, over eight feet falling right in Sierra City.

Old timers say that sucha storm was never known before.

Sierra City is certainly ill-fated. There is probably no place in the world of this size that has had so many misfortunes as the town. For the past two years nothing has gone right.

Just two years ago this time, small pox broke out, and for three months the village was quarantined on every side. Several deaths occurred and others lay suffering with the dreadful disease.

There was a general depression of business and the town had the appearance of being deserted. After that, fevers and deaths were frequent. Then followed a general failure of certain mines to

pan out as expected, which injured the town in many ways causing businesses to fall off greatly.

Following this, a disasterous fire raged around us the latter part of last summer which caused loss of life and destroyed property and timber to the amount of thousands of dollars, besides causing the Sierra Buttes, one of Sierra City's main supports, to be closed many months, which threw 150 men out of employment. Next came the fearful calamity of last Friday which caused the people to think that Sierra City is doomed to an everlasting seige of misfortune.

ANOTHER SLIDE

Another fatal slide occurred on the South Fork two and one half miles below Sierra City near the Marguerite Mine, supposed to have taken place early Friday morning of last week. A man named Lindstrom, his wife and son, a boy about seventeen years of age, lived in a cabin a short distance below the works on the north side of the river. Some time during the night a slide struck the house, breaking it to pieces and burying the inmates under

the snow and broken timbers.

The discovery of the slide was made by a Chinaman who had a cabin near the Lindstroms. He had got frightened and gone down the river to a place of safety and had returned to the cabin to get some provisions and found it gone. He then saw the Lindstrom's house was gone and, hastening to the Marguerite Mine, gave an alarm.

A party of men immediately went to the rescue. Lindstrom was found alive but insensible, buried under two feet of snow with his shoulders dislocated and otherwise injured. He undoubtedly owes his life to the fact that a board shielded him from the snow and that some of the bed clothing remained wrapped around him. The body of his wife was lying near him. She apparently having been badly injured if not killed by a blow on the head from some of the timber. The body of the boy has not been found.

According to the man's story, himself and his wife went to bed leaving the boy reading. Later he awoke and found the boy still' reading. That was the last he knew until awakened by the jar and roar of the avalanche after which all was blank. The boy's bed with his coat thrown across the foot was found wrecked. Had he been in, he no doubt, would have been killed. The man was taken to the mine and properly cared for, being a relative of Suprintendent Morris. This man went insane afterwards and the boy's bones were found in a ditch below where the house had stood.

Written by an unknown contemporary of the avalanche.

Courtesy of Frank "Beets" Fortes.

(Our thanks to our ever faithful correspondent, Jeanne McMahan, for the above article.)