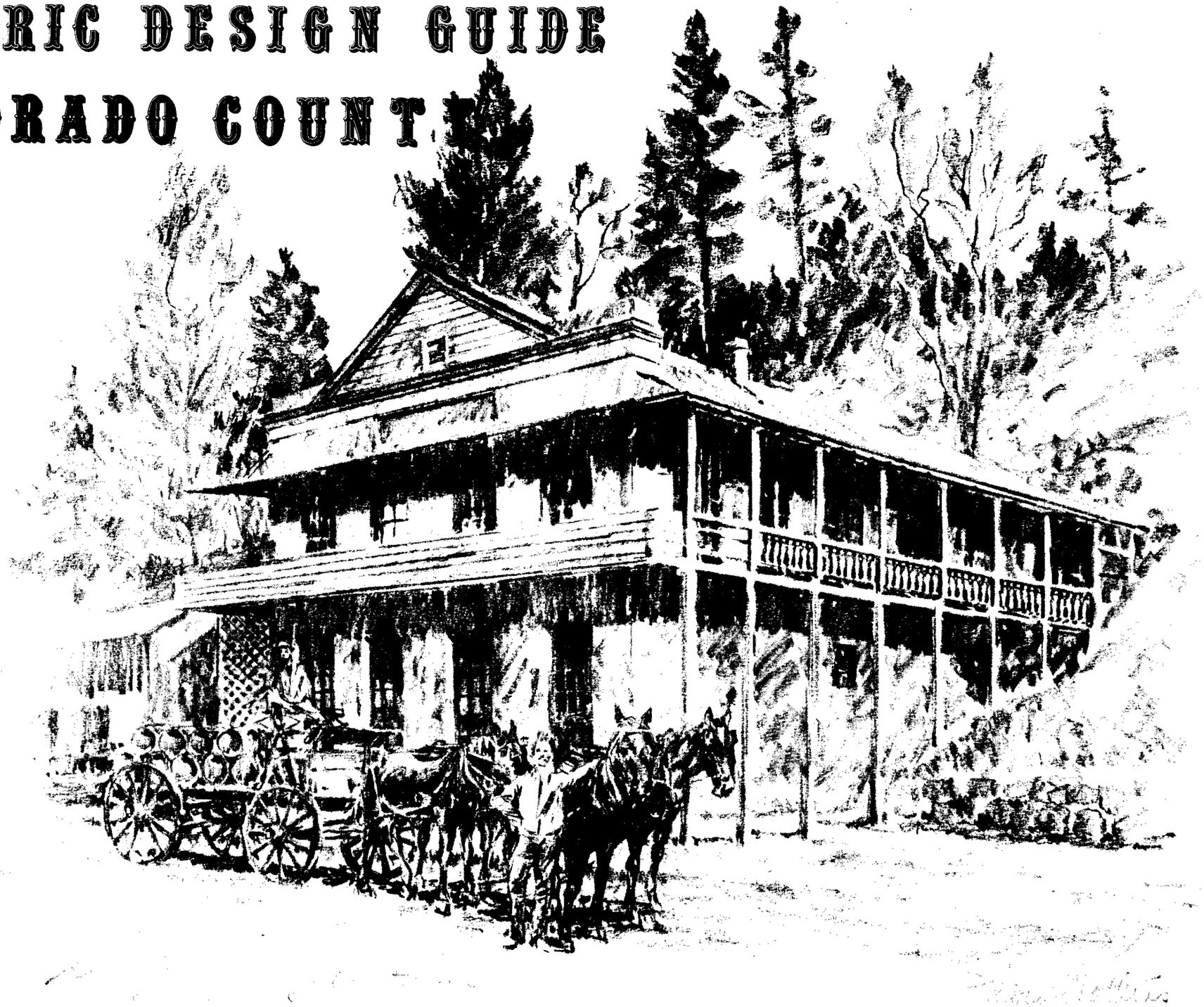
HISTORIC DESIGN GUIDE

EL DORADO COUNTY



HISTORIC DESIGN GUIDE

EL DORADO COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Drawing on front cover by courtesy of Friday House, Coloma

GOLD RUSH DESIGN PERIOD 1850-1900

"The sidewalks swarmed with people--to such an extent, indeed, that it was generally no easy matter to stem the human tide. The streets themselves were just as crowded with quartz-wagons, freight-teams, and other vehicles. The procession was endless. So great was the pack, that buggies frequently had to wait half an hour for an opportunity to cross the principal street. Joy sat on every countenance, and there was a glad, almost fierce, intensity in every eye, that told of the money-getting schemes that were seething in every brain and the high hope that held sway in every heart. Money was as plenty as dust; every individual considered himself wealthy, and a melancholy countenance was nowhere to be seen. There were military companies, fire companies, brass-bands, banks, hotels, theaters, 'hurdy-gurdy houses', wide-open gambling-palaces, political pow-wows, civic processions, street-fights, murders, inquests, riots, a whiskey-mill every fifteen steps, a Board of Alderman, a Mayor, a City Surveyor, a City Engineer, a Chief of the Fire Department, with First, Second, and Third Assistants, a Chief of Police, City Marshal, and a large police force, two Boards of Mining Brokers, a dozen breweries, and half a dozen jails and station-houses in full operation, and some talk of building a church. The 'flush times' were in magnificent flower! Large fire-proof brick buildings were going up in the principal streets, and the wooden suburbs were spreading out in all directions. Town lots soared up to prices that were amazing."

Description of an historic mining town
by Mark Twain from Roughing It

HISTORIC DESIGN CONTROL...-DH

Historic design control is intended to protect, enhance and promote the use of areas and buildings judged to be of special historical significance.

In a Mother Lode County like El Dorado County, it would require new buildings in areas such as Coloma and Georgetown to generally conform to the type of architecture prevalent in the gold mining areas of California during the period 1850 to 1900.

This guide gives examples in text and pictures of such architecture and is intended not to set strict limits to the type of development permissible, but to provide guidelines for determining whether a proposed development follows the style of architecture commonly termed "gold rush" (or "western frontier").

The Board of Supervisors has already adopted, in September 1980, a design control ordinance which allows it to create a historical design control district, within which this type of architecture would be required. This guide is to help implement that ordinance.

In creating a historical design control district, the Board is limited to areas shown in the adopted General Plan for historic design and must say why and what specific places, sites, buildings and areas are to be included in that district.

Many new building materials are available which can be used in place of the original materials, but which do not substantially change the character or appearance of old buildings being restored or of new buildings when compared to the old buildings.

Criteria for evaluation will include: forms (height, number of stories, roof pitch, etc.), materials, textures, colors, plus excavation, structure placement, signs, landscaping, parking, walls, fences and walks.

ORDINANCE EXCERPTS

Sec. 9395.4 Any (Historical Design Control) district created pursuant to Section 9395.2(b) 2 shall be designated on zoning maps as Design Historical (-DH).

When creating such districts, the Board of Supervisors shall determine the specific places, sites, buildings and structures which have special historical interest and the specific reasons for which each should receive the benefit of special regulation for protection and preservation.

The creation of Historical Design Control Districts (-DH) shall be limited to those areas shown in the adopted General Plan for historic design.

All new construction of a residential, commercial or industrial nature shall conform in exterior styling to the style of architecture referred to as "gold rush" type or "western frontier" type, as such types are exemplified by the Land Development Manual.

Sec. 9395.5(a) No historical building in any historical design district may be torn down, demolished, destroyed, altered, removed, improved or otherwise changed in exterior appearance without first obtaining a permit.

SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

The foothill and mountain mining towns of the Mother Lode grew by addition and were not laid out with their streets forming a grid pattern. Roads and streets were built to the contours. Homes, too, were built to fit the lay of the land. Little site grading was done with the exception of excavation for basements. Grading of large pads for homesites should, therefore, be avoided.

-Many features were common to the early one and two story dwellings.

-Roofs were gabled with a moderate to steep pitch on the main structure. They were most often covered with wooden shakes or shingles or corrugated iron.

-Porches were found in front, protected by a shed roof and supported by pillars.

-Siding was commonly shiplap, clapboard, or vertical board and batten. The former were frequently painted white or gray, or red oxide and subtle yellows. The latter was most often left natural.

SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

-Windows were divided by mullions into small, interesting panes.

-Louvered, wooden window shutters were found on many dwellings, these being painted a contrasting color.

-Several unique features were often used.

-Turned porch pillars were common with others being square timbers sometimes eased-edged with a draw-knife.

-Most porches had railings with turned or jig-sawed balusters supporting the long railing. Some porches had open latticed trim along the top and sides.

-Many gables were trimmed inside and bore an ornamental peak at their apex.

MULTIPLE RESIDENTIAL

Early multiple residential buildings were comprised mainly of boarding houses, inns, hotels, and way-houses for travelers. Contemporary apartments can still be built within the exterior facade of these early hostels.

-Two and three storied structures were most popular.

-Gabled rooflines with shed-roofed porches were common. Some had more elaborate roof structures with steeples, spires, and elaborate gable and eave trimmings.

-Stained-glass feature windows were sometimes found.

-Exterior finishes were colorful and interesting without being garish or offensive.

-External appearance was often the same as single family residences.

-Both upper and lower porches had turned or square support columns and bannisters.

-Inns and hotels were often combined with taverns and restaurants.

COMMERCIAL

Many Gold Rush business structures were large, imposing, two and three story buildings. Often they were separate buildings, each containing individual trades, markets, or enterprises.

-Brick and masonry exterior walls were chosen for security and longevity.

-Iron shuttered doors were used to gain security.

-Roof styles varied from gable roofs, some with false fronts, to hip and shed roofs. Roofing material included wooden shakes, shingles, and corrugated iron.

-Covered sidewalks were always present with porches supported by turned or square columns. Columns were sometimes "sway-braced".

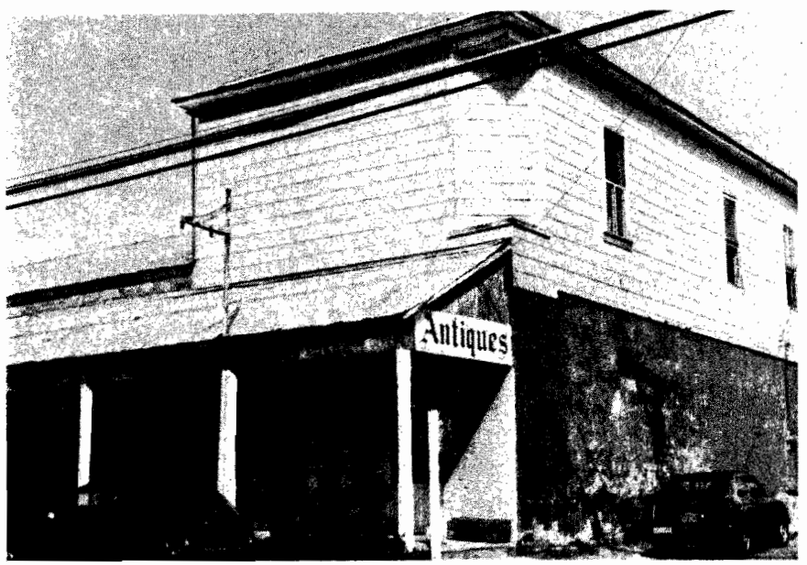
-Board sidewalks were commonly found with variations to brick and stone paving and later poured concrete.

COMMERCIAL

-Upper-story porches were commonplace, with turned-spindle bannisters or ornamental iron railings.

-Wooden frame structures often bore clapboard or shiplap siding.

-Fraternal lodges such as Knights of Pythias, I.O.O.F. and E. Clampus Vitus often located in commercial districts.



SERVICE STATIONS

It is sometimes necessary to locate gasoline service stations in the midst of historic districts even though livery stables, blacksmith shops, and feed stores provided their displaced functions in Gold Rush times.

-Exterior appearance must be completely in keeping with the surrounding historic buildings.

-Exterior finishes should be in accord with those in the commercial district. Firesafe materials may be used whose appearance is compatible with Gold Rush Period appearance.

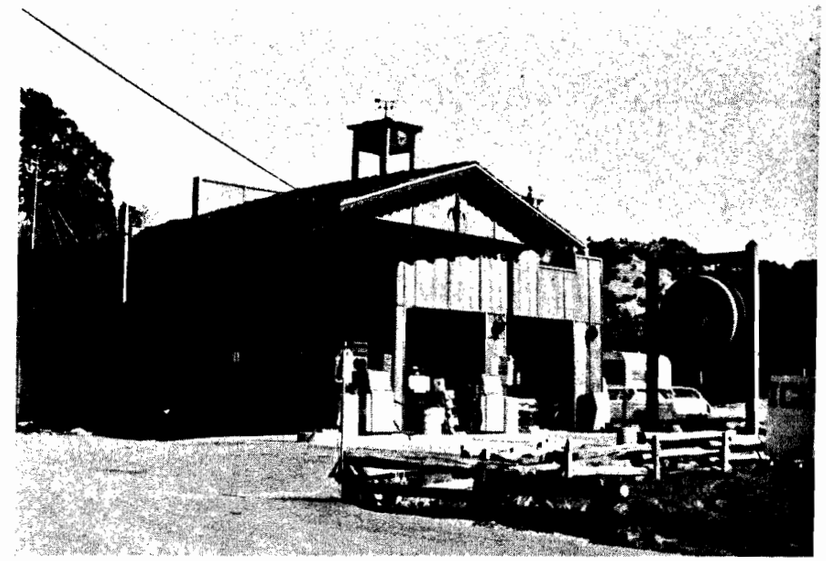
-Sites and structures should be kept small but yet large enough to be usable.

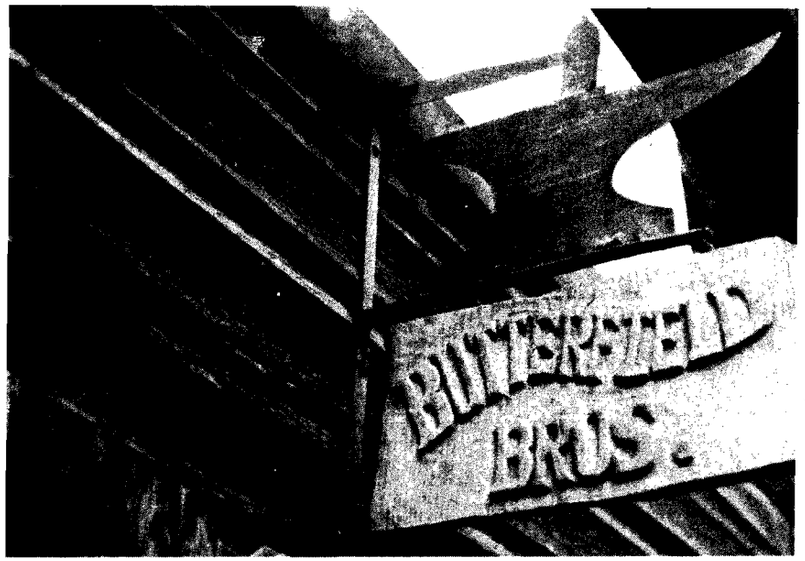
-Service can be provided in conjunction with another commercial use, the structure being in accord with historic commercial areas.

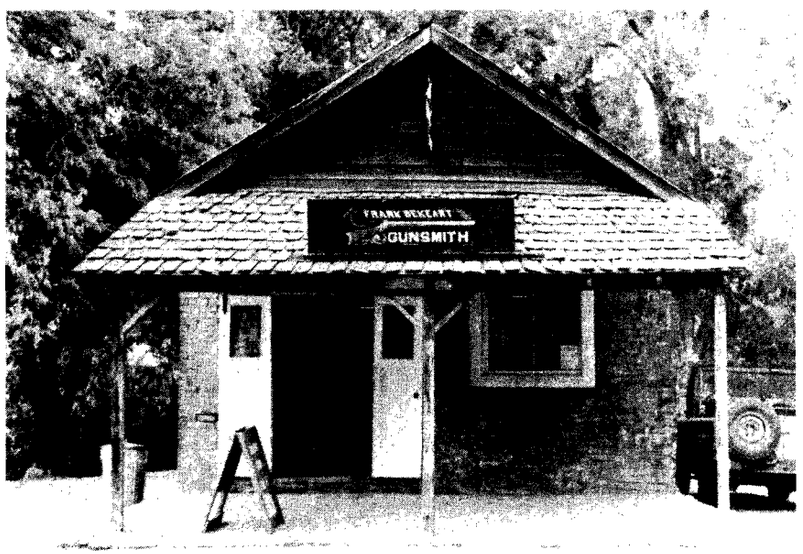
-Exterior displays of merchandise and signs should not exist.

-Paving in frontal area should be kept to the minimum necessary for ingress and egress.

-Accessory signing should be limited to very small window or interior display.







SIGNS

-Signs are a necessary adjunct to commercial enterprise.

-Signs are necessary to attract customers and identify the type of business.

-A sign should not dominate the site or detract from the building's appearance.

-Integrate the sign's shape and appearance with the exterior forms, colors, and materials of the building.

-Use sign shape, size, and character similar to those of the Gold Rush Period.

-Use sign copy and letters similar to those used during the Gold Rush Period.

-Identifying symbols typical of the trades being carried on are desirable.

-Signs fixed to buildings should be small or placed parallel to the facia.

SIGNS

-Plain wooden or painted signs are typical of this period.

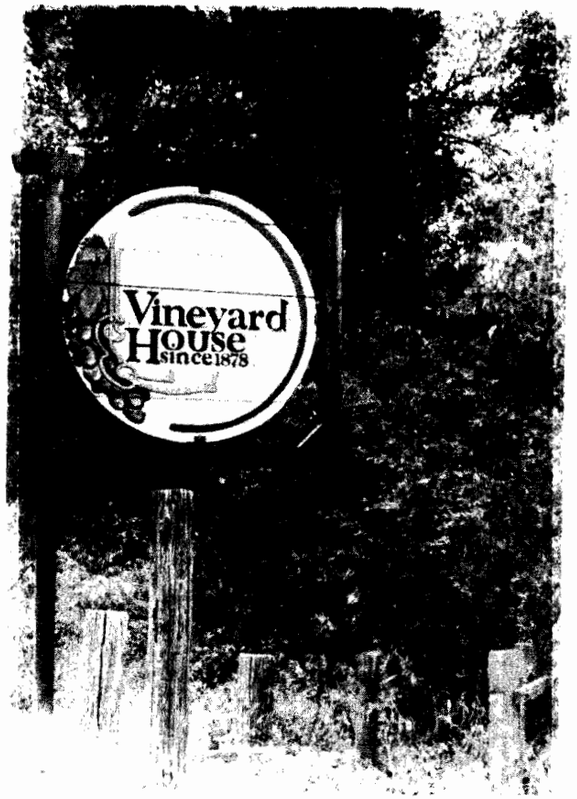
-Plastic, neon, or interior lit signs are not compatible with Gold Rush architecture.

-Use imaginative approaches to signing.

-Free standing signs should incorporate style and materials matching the establishment they are identifying.

-No sign should be placed in a manner which would disfigure or conceal any architectural feature or details of any building or historical site.

-Accessory or copyrighted signs (e.g., Bank-americard, AAA, Carte Blanche, Mastercharge) should not be displayed outside but may be very small and placed in a window or displayed inside.



EXAMPLES OF SIGN LETTERS

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890

PLAYBILL

ABCDEFGHIJ
KLMNOPQRST
UVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmno
pqrstuvwxyz
1234567890

WAGON TRAIN

AABCCDEEFGGHHIIJKK
KLLMMNNOPPQRRRRS
SSTTUUVVWWXXYYYZ
abcdefghijkklmnopqrsStuvwxyz
1234567890

BOOKMAN BOLD ITALIC W/SWASH

ABCDEFGhIJKLMN
OPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwx
yz 1234567890

GOUDY MEDIEVAL

ABCDEFGHIJKLMN
OPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrs
tuwxyz
1234567890

GARAMOND

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVW
XYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890

ALTERNATE GOTHIC

ABCDEFGHIJKL
MNOPQRSTUVW
XYZ
1234567890

CIVIL WAR SERIES B

ABCDEFGHI
JKLMNOPQ
RSTUVWXY
Z
1234567890

CIVIL WAR SERIES D

ABCDEFGHIJKLMN
OPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

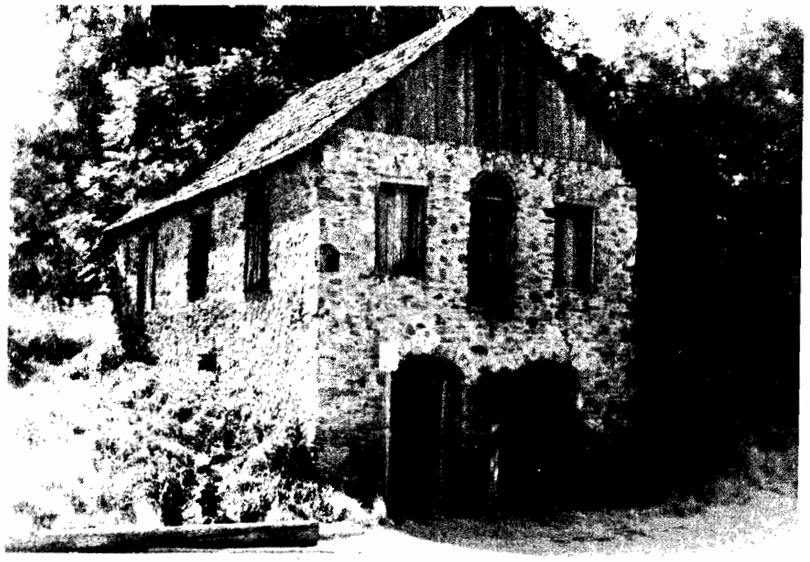
CIVIL WAR SERIES E

ABCDEFGHIJKLM
NOPQRSTUVWXYZ

CIVIL WAR SERIES G

ABCDEFGHIJ
KLMNOPQRST
UVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmn
opqrstuvwxyz
1234567890

CIVIL WAR SERIES H



LIGHT INDUSTRIAL AND STORAGE BUILDINGS

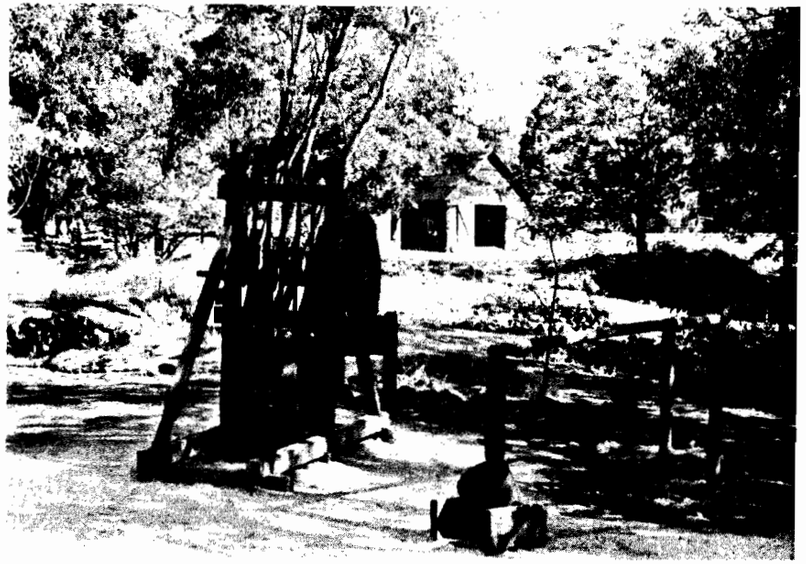
-Many early warehouses were of masonry construction.

-Stone, block, or brick buildings provided security for valuable materials and tools.

-Often they provided a cooler working environment in the hot summer foothills.

-Other types of construction, such as wooden frame buildings, were used and corrugated metal was used not only in roofing but also for siding.

-Large, heavy wooden and iron doors provided additional security.



HISTORICAL EQUIPMENT DISPLAYS

-Use displays of mining equipment to enhance developments.

-Mining artifacts can be integrated with street furniture to create interesting plazas.

-Artifacts such as wagons, trappings, sawmill equipment, and early day tools can also be displayed indoors and out to create interest.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION ..... WHY DO IT?

(Extracted from Historic Preservation Element Guidelines by the Office of Planning and Research, State of California, September 1976)

CULTURAL

In the past, historic resources were cherished for their patriotic association and instructional purposes ... but, the presence of the past can expand our understanding of who we are, where we have been, and where we might be going. The tangible presence of buildings and sites that speak of other people and other times are a form of history ... The styles, materials and tastes of past inhabitants supply alternatives to present choices and challenge the imagination to improve on both.

Familiar landmarks establish a sense of permanence and well-being. If we can see and touch older building materials or examples of lost craft skills, we may learn delight in the work of another time and take more care that such treasures are preserved as surely as other non-renewable resources.

The psychological benefits of "feeling at home" are as real and important as the educational and aesthetic values of historic preservation ... People can learn from their community: they can learn history and architecture, they can learn pride, they can learn delight, and they can learn to care for their place.

ECONOMIC

Some economic benefits are well known, especially those related to tourism and the tourist industry ... Recently, other economic benefits have surfaced with even wider appeal ...

(1) Property values - rehabilitated and protected historic sites and districts acquire prestige and distinction; the property is more valuable and this fact is reflected in resale value.

(2) Retail Sales and Commercial Rents - an increasing number of communities are turning to historic preservation and compatible design controls in older core areas and peripheral commercial districts. Shoppers, business people, and professionals are attracted by the closer, warmer feel of older business blocks and rental space has increased in value along with retail sales.

(3) Replacement Costs - in a period of diminishing resources, expensive building materials and rising construction costs, recycling older structures is gaining credibility and popularity as more cost effective.

(4) Tax Revenue - if historic recognition makes residential property more valuable and if rehabilitation and restoration of historic structures raise their assessed value, then tax revenue correspondingly increases.

GENERAL POLICIES

1. This Design Guide is not meant to strictly limit the type of new development within an Historic District. It may be liberally interpreted as long as the proposed development does not significantly detract from the historic district.

2. All exterior appearances on new and restored buildings should be similar to the pictures and descriptions contained herein or other type of "Gold Rush Design." It is recognized that the contents of this Design Guide may not encompass the full range of building styles and materials typical of the period.

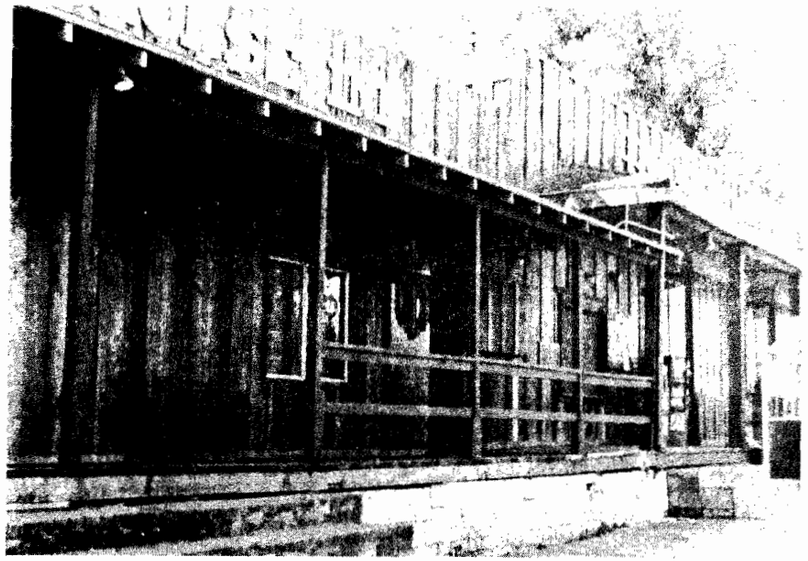
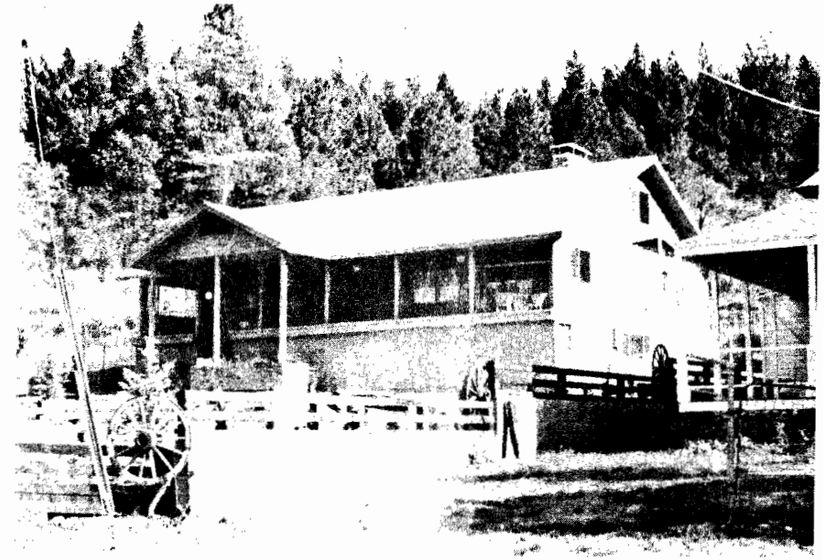
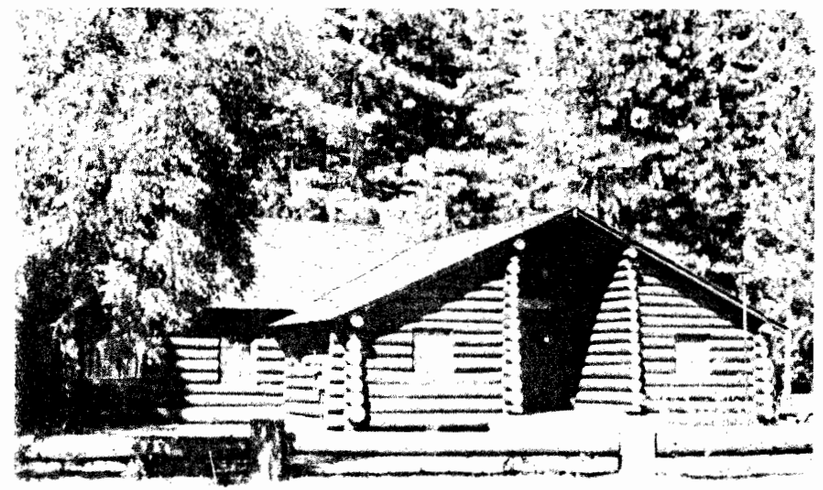
3. New buildings should have a primary roofline which resembles the buildings shown by pictures included herein.

4. Parking areas should be located where they are least visible from the front or prominent view of any structure.

5. Authentic historical signs should be permitted in conjunction with small business identification signs. Documentation of their former existence must be provided.

6. Landscaping should be sufficient to break up large areas of paving and to screen objectionable views while enhancing the appearance of any development.

7. The spirit of this Design Guide should be to encourage cooperation with private developers to retain the unique historical character of any historic district.

8. In the case of existing structures where such structures do not conform to this Design Guide and where the floor area of any proposed addition does not exceed that of the existing structure, the addition should conform to the existing structure in external appearance.

STRUCTURES CONFORMING TO GOLD RUSH DESIGN