The Compere Store

This beautiful stone building at the west end of Murphys on the corner of Main Street and Church Street was built of rhyolite blocks and limestone in 1858, and was renovated and turned into a home in 1939.

On October 14, 1855, Alexander Putney sold part of a lot formerly known as the William Connell Bowling Alley lot to Pierre Fittere.[1] It was forty foot wide and ran back to a new street that is now called Church Street that is behind Main Street. Fittere sold the property to another French man, Pierre Bonnet, in 1857 when it had a framed building occupied by a store, a barn and a cook room.[2]



The Compere store building. It is now a private residence.

Pierre Bonnet built the stone store building on the land in 1858 and he kept the property until May 28, 1861, when he sold it to brothers Victor and Eugene Compere[3] who were born in France. The brothers also purchased all the medicines that were in a house owned by Dolores Compere, but occupied as an apothecary by Doctor Lefevre.[4] The Compere brothers are presumed to have sold the medicines in their store along with groceries, liquor and other merchandise. The relationship of Dolores Compere to the two brothers is unknown. In 1866 Eugene Compere sold his interest in the Compere Store to his brother Victor, leaving Victor in full ownership with the property described as a "*stone fire proof store, store house and dwelling house and other structures being known as the trading post of Compere and Bro.*"

Victor Compere continued to purchase other real estate while still running the Compere Store. In 1863 he purchased a one fifth interest in a mining claim on Murphys Flat and in 1866 Victor Compere purchased a lot with a wooden dwelling house on it that was located on Church Street. He also bought the house owned by Martha Johnson that was located west of the Compere Store. He continued to expand his real estate holdings by purchasing the stone store owned by Andre Raulin in 1869.

The Compere family suffered a lot of tragedy. Victorine and Eugenia Compere had daughters Bertha, Angele and Eugenia Marie and in January of 1870 they had a son, George. George must have died young since he was not in the 1880 census, but there is no record of when he died. Eugenia Compere died September 26, 1880 at the age of fifty. The Calaveras Citizen on October 2, 1880 said that she had been ill for some time and had got out of bed and wandered a short distance from the house, falling in the Pump Hole near Murphys Brewery. She was found in a dying state and did not survive. It

was not clear if it was an accident or a suicide attempt. She was buried in Saint Patrick's Church cemetery in Murphys.

Victorine Compere registered to vote in Murphys in 1893. He died on December 31, 1896 in Stockton and was buried beside his wife in Murphys.

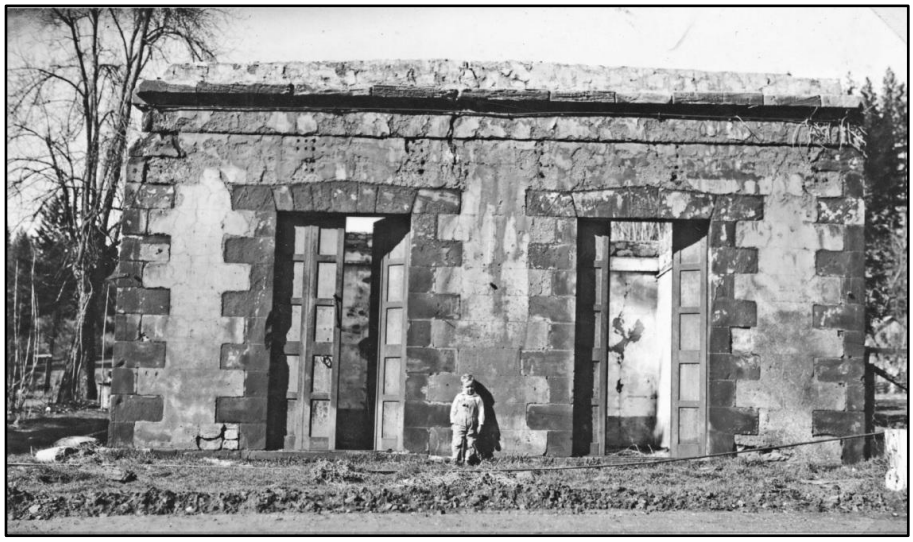


Hauselt's Pump Hole.

The Compere daughters all married. Eugenie married Gilbert Pfortner in 1894 and they had two daughters, Alzoe and Zelda. Their only son died in 1896 when only 13 days old. Angele Compere married Frank Coughlin in 1895 with their first child born in Murphys on April 21, 1896 and dying the same day. Frank Coughlin died in 1903. Bertha Compere married Bernardo "Ben" Gianelli and was widowed in 1902 leaving her with three children, the youngest only six years old.

The estate of Victorine Compere in Murphys was left to his three daughters, who granted all their rights to the property to his granddaughter Antoinetta Gianelli, giving her ownership of the store and house as well as the old Raulin Store on the south side of Main Street and four vacant lots near the Raulin Store.[5] According to the Calaveras Prospect dated November 24, 1917, the Compere's home was taken down in 1917 since it was no longer useable: *"Frank Harrington has been engaged in tearing down the old Compere house on Main St. It was alongside of the store building."* [6]

Frank Harrington owned the store by 1921, but in the 1930 to 1935 tax assessments Sinforosa Morales was listed as paying the taxes om the store building. It is possible that Morales lived in the building and did not run a store.



The Compere store building in 1937

Sinforosa Morales was a teamster in the census records for 1910, and later he was a trapper. He had been married, and had one son, but he and his wife divorced.

His mother is listed as Latora who was a Native American and his father was Evalio Morales. Sinforosa's only known sibling was Frank Morales who married the granddaughter of Native Americans called Walker and Susanna.

The stone store building survived and was extensively remodeled in 1939 and made into a home. Ruth Steffa was the person named in the taxes in 1940, when it was no longer a store but now a remodeled house. Her husband Don Steffa was a mining engineer. The building would certainly have suffered the fate of other stone buildings on Main Street if it had not been purchased and renovated, since many of the stone buildings were taken down by 1940 due to their poor condition.



The Compere Store building in 1937. The two story home of James M. Stephens is on Lot 5 next to it. Note how narrow Church Street was at that time.
(Courtesy of the Calaveras Co. Archives)



End Notes- Block 11, Lot 6

1. Calaveras County Deed Bk. B, page 272 : Putney to Fittere
2. Calaveras County Deed Book B, page 1041: Fittere to Bonnett
3. Deed Book F, page 393.: Bonnett to Compere
4. Calaveras County Deed Book K, page 277. Lefevre to Compere
5. Calaveras County Deed Book 47, page 136. Compere estate to Gianelli
6. Prospect 11/24/1917