



## **THE NORTH STAR HOUSE – A NEVADA COUNTY GEM**

By: Joe Heckel, President, North Star Historic Conservancy  
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In 2003, a building sat vacant. It was in poor condition and deteriorating to the point of collapse. Rain poured into the building from a failing roof and through open windows. The interior had been vandalized, with all fixtures stripped and graffiti covered the walls. Piles of garbage and debris littered the floors. There was no heat, water or sewer. What occurred next to this building and the surrounding property is one of the more remarkable stories of perseverance and dedication for our County.

This building and its surrounding grounds contain a unique legacy. It was once a beautiful iconic landmark, serving as the main building for the second largest gold producer in California history; the home of one most significant and interesting families in the American West and the first major work of a premier female architect.

The building, of course, is The North Star House at 12075 Auburn Road, south of Grass Valley. Through the efforts and vision of countless volunteers and leaders of our community, this 10,000 square foot building stands today, very much intact. The grounds have been cleaned of debris, abandoned cars, excessive vegetation and the historic gardens are being restored. The North Star House is now managed and operated by the North Star Historic Conservancy (NSHC), a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization.

The North Star House was designed by famed architect Julia Morgan and built in 1905 for the owners of the North Star Mine. The North Star House served as the social headquarters of the North Star Mine, and was where the public and investors were invited to meet and greet. This special example of California Craftsman Style architecture was recently placed on the National and the California State Historic Buildings Registers.

It served as the home to mine superintendent Arthur DeWint Foote, his wife, Mary Hallock Foote and their children. Arthur, known as A.D., was an engineering genius who pioneered the use of the Pelton wheel and designed the Tyler-Foote Road. He was also an amateur botanist who shared his work with such notable horticulturists as Luther Burbank and Felix Gillet. Mary was as remarkable as A.D., as she was an accomplished artist who illustrated the works of many prominent authors of the period including Bret Harte and Nathaniel Hawthorne. She was a regular correspondent to periodicals such as

Harper's Weekly, where she shared her perspective of a Victorian woman in the Gold Country.

The House and surrounding historic grounds was seen as a historically important site that a few thoughtful citizens recognized as worthy of preservation and restoration. In 2004, the owner and prospective developer of the 762 acre North Star property donated the House and 14 acres to the Nevada County Land Trust, today the Bear Yuba Land Trust. In 2006, the NSHC was created to restore and manage the North Star House and the historic grounds. After years of volunteer labor and an infusion of donated funds and materials, the House and grounds have been significantly improved and made more accessible to the public.

Now fast forward onto 2014 and what is happening for the property and The North Star House. The NSHC has prepared a Master Plan for the 14 acres which not only seeks to restore and rehabilitate The North Star House and grounds, but allows it to be opened to the public in a phased approach. Our goal is to continue to restore the North Star House and open it as a cultural event center. The North Star House will serve as a venue for a wide range of social, cultural and educational opportunities including exhibits, meetings, classes, performances and gatherings of all types. Funds obtained from these activities will be invested into restoration efforts. Our applications to approve our Master Plan were presented before the Nevada County Board of Supervisors on September 9, 2014 and unanimously approved by a 5-0 vote.

The North Star House can and will become a cultural event center for Nevada County; please help us make the North Star shine once again with your generous support!