

# Historic Lode foundry to become a living museum



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SUTTER CREEK - Experts on America's vanishing industrial heritage are cheering a decision this week by Sutter Creek to buy a 19th-century foundry to keep it alive as living history.

The foundry hearkens to the past in Sutter Creek, where decades before the web of electric power lines began crisscrossing American cities, residents ran machines on high-pressure water power.

And holding onto the past, City Manager Rob Duke said, will help Sutter Creek prosper in the future.

## KNIGHT FOUNDRY

Learn about the Knight Foundry online at [www.knightfoundry.org](http://www.knightfoundry.org).

The Knight Foundry will be managed as a living museum that both produces iron products and trains engineers and others in the industrial methods of the 1800s.

"This is the thing that makes us different than all the other towns up in the Mother Lode," Duke said.

Sutter Creek was different, too, not long after the Gold Rush, when high-pressure water piped to turbines turned clothes washers, sewing machines and even a newspaper printing press.

The man who made it happen was Samuel Newman Knight, a millwright from Maine, who in 1872 designed the Mokelumne River-water-powered factory that now bears his name. He also created the water turbines that can still be found in the basements of some Sutter Creek homes.

Virtually the entire factory is still standing, in working order or close to it, even though molten iron hasn't been poured there since 1996. And now, preservationists have inked a deal to ensure that Knight's legacy will last as long as the massive iron housings he cast.

"It is unique," Robert C. Stewart, president of the Michigan-based Society for Industrial Archeology, said of the Knight Foundry. "One reason why it is unique is that a good part of the machinery runs on water power. That is very, very unusual to see something like that last to the present day."

That foundry - really an entire industrial complex that includes cast iron, a machine shop and other industrial facilities - produced a wide array of goods, including road-making machines, dredge pumps that cleared harbors in Washington and Oregon, and hydroelectric turbines for power companies across the Western United States.

Knight was a mechanical genius who went from building ships out of wood to mastering then-new technologies such as gasoline engines and electrical power generation, said Andy Fahrenwald, 64, project director for the Knight Foundry Corp., the nonprofit organization that will operate the foundry. Sutter Creek is contributing \$300,000 toward the \$1.3 million cost to buy the Knight Foundry, Duke said. The rest of the money is coming from private donations.

City ownership of the site means the Knight Foundry Corp. and the city can apply for a variety of state and private foundation grants for historical preservation. The property needs \$700,000 in immediate improvements, including removal of lead-contaminated dust, Duke said.

Fahrenwald said the price for full restoration will be around \$4.5 million. Fahrenwald, who regularly crawls through the factory's rafters oiling machines, said that it was a tradition in the plant for retiring workers to write their names in chalk on the wooden beams. He said as much as possible of the chalk-inscribed wood will be preserved.

Samuel Newman Knight, however, never retired. He died at age 75 after exhausting himself through overwork, Fahrenwald said. "He caught a cold and succumbed," Fahrenwald said.

Someone else not long after climbed to the top of an enormous shed used for machining 25-foot-diameter iron parts for centrifugal dredge pumps and went to work with a piece of chalk. The results are still faintly visible: "SNK died Jan. 13, 1913."

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