

County of Nevada
State of California

Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission
Application for Landmark Registration of Historical Resource

Name of proposed landmark: THE SAN JUAN RIDGE TAPESTRY PROJECT

Consisting of twelve individual embroidered tapestries depicting scenes and histories of the San Juan Ridge, Nevada County, California

Location, including Assessor's Parcel Number, of property on which resource is located


NORTH COLUMBIA SCHOOLHOUSE CULTURAL CENTER
ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER: 061-130-020-000

Name of applicant NORTH COLUMBIA SCHOOLHOUSE CULTURAL CENTER

Address: 17894 TYLER FOOTE ROAD, NEVADA CITY, CA, 95959

Home or work phone 530-265-2826 cell phone _____

I consent to this application and authorize the placing of a plaque or marker on site.



Owner's signature



Date

Holly Tornheim, Board Member, on behalf of the North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center.

Brief history and description of proposed landmark

(attach additional sheets as necessary)

The San Juan Ridge Tapestries are a group of twelve individual tapestries depicting the rich history of the San Juan Ridge from prehistoric times to recent cultural institutions created by and for the San Juan Ridge Community. The project was conceived and executed by a group of dedicated women and men of the San Juan Ridge beginning in 2007. Materials and techniques were modeled on the Bayeux Tapestry, a 1,000 year old Medieval tapestry in France celebrating the war of 1066. Each tapestry is embroidered by hand on linen from full size background drawings. Each tapestry illustrates a specific chapter in the history of the ridge community. The titles and chronological order of the 12 tapestries are as follows:

NUMBER	TITLE
1	FALL CELEBRATIONS
2	THE NORTH COLUMBIA SCHOOLHOUSE CULTURAL CENTER
3	THEN AND NOW
4	CATTLE DRIVE
5	DON'T MINE OUR WATER
6	BUILDING THE OAK TREE SCHOOL
7	THE BLUE CRADLE
8	SOUTH YUBA RIVER
9	SAN JUAN RIDGE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT
10	HOW WE LIVE & WORK PARTIES
11	ARTISTS AND ARTISANS
12	WINTER FOREST

Originally created to be housed in the North Columbia School, to wrap around all walls of the main classroom space. The Tapestry is now stored in a climate controlled and fire safe archive. It is available to be displayed in the schoolhouse or other venues from time to time. The last showing was at the June 2024 meeting of the Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission at the North Columbia Schoolhouse.

Historically significant aspects or properties of proposed landmark

The San Juan Ridge Tapestries represent the living history of the San Juan Ridge. There are thousands of hours of hand stitchery using fine woolen yarns by men and women of the community in weekly stitching sessions starting in 2007 ending in 2022. It is a unique depiction using embroidery to tell the story of a community and a place.

How will the landmark be protected and maintained?

The North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center, a 501-C-3 Non Profit cultural and educational institution, is the designated owner and custodian of the tapestries. The Board of the Cultural Center has ensured that the tapestries are stored according to very strict archival methods to insure their safety and preservation.

Bibliography. Cite or attach available books, records, articles or other materials pertaining to the proposed landmark.

Books and articles:

Historical or civil records: (e.g., ownership, assessments etc.)

Other: (e.g. photographs, prints or drawings. Please list and attach separately)

Please see attached to this application a description of the tapestry project and a brief description of each tapestry. A link to the San Juan Ridge Tapestry Project website is attached below:

<https://www.sanjuanridgetapestryproject.org/>



Applicant's signature



Date

Holly Tornheim, Board Member, on behalf of the North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center.



Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission
c/o Clerk of the Board, 950 Maidu Ave, PO Box 599002, Nevada City, Cal.
95959

Attachments and related documents may be submitted in electronic format to info@nevadacountylandmarks.com.

An application must be considered solely on its historic or architectural merits and not for commercial gain, political benefits, or other non historical reasons.

An individual Commissioner can advise and counsel an applicant, but all applications must be considered by the full Commission, meeting in regular session.

ATTACHMENT 1: THE SAN JUAN RIDGE TAPESTRY PROJECT

In the late 11th century, Anglo-Saxon artists chronicled the Norman invasion of England by William the Conqueror. They used an age-old and durable method of storytelling - linen backing, wool yarns, and vegetable dyes. The result was the Bayeux Tapestry. For centuries it was stored and annually displayed in the Cathedral in Bayeux France. It caused a sensation when it was exhibited in the Louvre 700 years after its creation, in 1797. Today it is viewed by 400,000 visitors annually in its own museum.

900 years later, a group of women, and eventually men, sat down to chronicle the 1970s invasion of a portion of the Sierra Nevada foothills by a committed group of back-to-the-landers. The result is the twelve San Juan Ridge tapestries made from similar materials and using similar techniques to the Bayeux Tapestry. From 2007 through 2022, over a hundred community members stitched for over 10,000 hours to create full-color renditions of people, places and events that were seminal to the creation of a unique culture that carries on to this day.

The "reinhabitators" of the San Juan Ridge, found inspiration in the poet, Gary Snyder's deep ecology philosophy and in the building of Gary's homestead - Kitkitdizze. The house is a modest pole framed rural dwelling originally built by hand without power tools in the manner of a Japanese farmhouse with touches based on Mandan lodges. Many conversations around this fire, with poets and philosophers from around the world, matured this group's back-to-the-land notions of the environment and social structures. They began to look at the region of the 100-mile Yuba River watershed as a bio-region based on the Yuba River watershed. This idea encompasses respect and stewardship all living creatures and a deep appreciation of all the people who came before them. Over the next 15 years, these folks founded numerous non-profits and created a tightknit neighborhood community guided by Buddhist tenets of loving kindness for all living creatures. They also resolved to stay put - to protect the land by creating a sustainable social and economic fabric that might last for generations.

The Tapestries tell their story, not in theories and abstractions but in concrete examples of political actions and heartfelt memories. The twelve tapestries together span 84 feet. The rich details of the stitchers' artistry reveal brightly colored scenes of momentous community events and subtly beautiful scenes of the river and forests of the western slope of the northern Sierra Nevada.

All tapestries are inspired by illustrious medieval work of art, the Bayeux Tapestry, which depicts the history of the battle of Hastings 1066. Scenes are embroidered on linen fabric with wool yarn and some cotton embroidery floss. Were all made between the years 2007 and 2022.

THE TAPESTRIES – IN ORDER OF CREATION



1 Fall Celebrations – Halloween Ceremony – This tapestry 144” x 30”, shows in meticulously detailed stitching, the background, scenery, events, and even the physical characteristics of the people whose historical moment has been captured. With fall colored trees in the one side and a green pine tree on the right side are four different entertainment circles that mark a day of celebration each fall that began in 1971. The events of the day proceed in the tapestry from left to right, the arrival of guests, a formal ceremonial circle, with plays, dances, music and ceremonies that have evolved to honor the place where we live. The birth of new babies are welcomed. Those that are no longer with us are remembered. The bottom row depicts various other events of the day, including children's parade, blowing the conch shells, speaking from the heart. Completed in 2010 by dozens of volunteer stitchers.



2 North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center – (72” x 30”) – The North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center tapestry depicts a center of community life for the ridge past and present. In 1982, after serving as a one room schoolhouse for over 100 years, the Cultural Center opened to host poetry readings, storytelling, community meetings, weddings, art shows, memorials, and ceremonies. In the middle section of the 6 foot long tapestry are banners of four popular annual events, Children’s art camp, Gamelan music, live music, and the Shindig. The lower panel begins with the origin of the Cultural Center. Mary Campbell, continuing the family generosity of the Coughlin family, agreed to the idea of the Culture Center. It is all the work of many hands. On the right side is a storytelling event in the amphitheater.



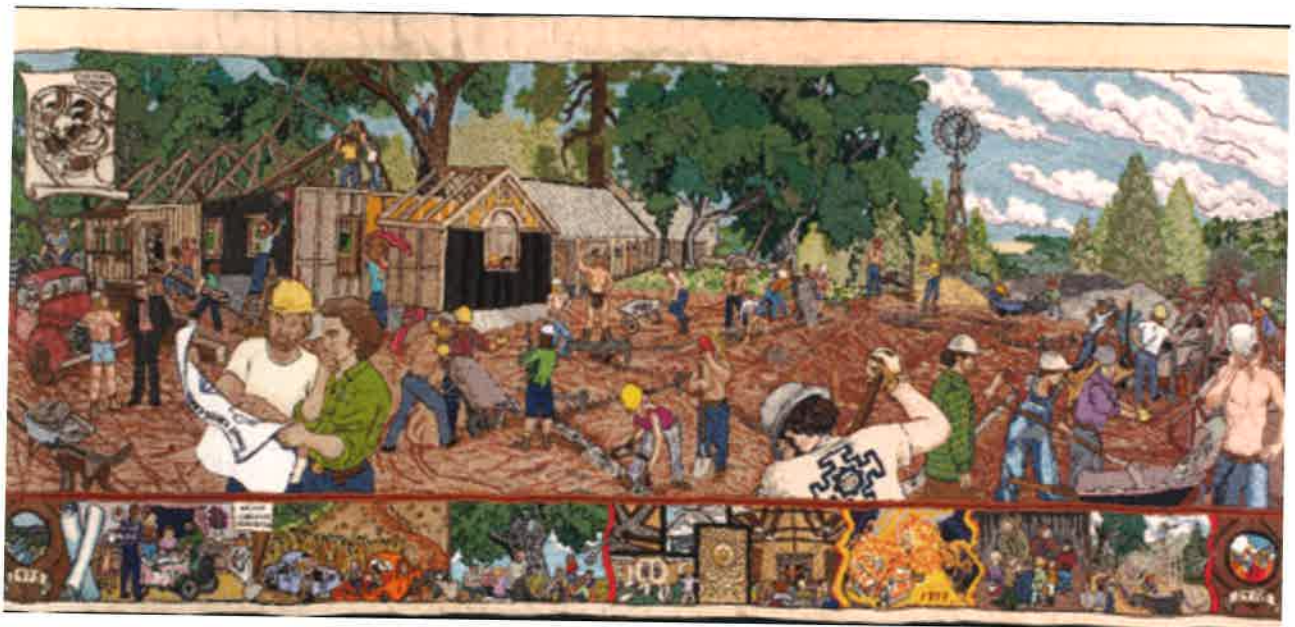
3 Then and Now – This 72" x 30" tapestry portrays the land before the gold rush on the left side, rich with large trees, animals, sparkling water and the Nisenan people. The fiery middle section symbolizes the cataclysm of the gold rush and the destructive work of the hydraulic mining years. The tapestry draws inspiration from the Kankou painter Frank Day. His image of a round house being destroyed in a whirlwind was used for the tapestry design in the middle. The section on the right side is the Diggings today with cliffs of Rose and Gold. Diggings or the influence of the Diggings now occupy 20% of the ridge. Despite the destruction, they are a source of awe and wonder. Children today enjoy them as a place to play, ride bikes, camp out, view the night sky, a place of unusual plants including the Sun dew, and insect eating plants. The North Columbia Diggings is the source of Shady Creek. Spring Creek runs through a portion of the digits to the South Yuba. These are important water sources for the South Yuba River and important water resources for local farms, ranchers, and the French Corral water district.



4 The Cattle Drive - The cattle drive, 72" x 30", features a scene in front of the Coughlin Ranch house at North Columbia. The Coughlin family noted for its hospitality and community mindedness provided water for public use outside their Tyler Foote Road home. This tapestry memorializes the annual Transport of cattle from the winter pastures near Smartsville to the summer mountain pastures. Kim Coughlin, the current matriarch and her partner, Jake Zancoco, watch from their favorite horses as the cattle are moved up to Tyler Foote road by riders and dogs. The bottom panel is the scene of another Coughlin family ranch house that once stood in the Spenceville area before the land was taken and used by the US government during World War II. The panel below shows the route of the drive between Smartsville and North Columbia



Don't Mine Our Water- 72" x 30", was the slogan of the most recent anti-mining campaign. The community response to the beginning of gold mining again was to form the San Juan Ridge Taxpayers Association. Among the activities of this campaign was fund raising illustrated by a poetry reading by Gary Snyder, research and a response to the EIR. Also occurring was the fleeing of the investors, lack of profits to the County, and in the end, the mine managers departing with the profits. The lower panel shows the tragic loss of water to homes and the local school.



6 Building the Oak Tree School - This tapestry, 72" x 30", illustrates some of the events surrounding the building of a new schoolhouse on the Ridge in the 1970's. Reflecting community ideals, local material and labor were used by local architects, Bruce Boyd and Jeff Gold. They are studying plans for the school in the middle left side. In the middle is the concrete pour facilitated by 100 people with their wheelbarrows. On the right side the Merken brothers from Graniteville keep the ancient mixers working. The bottom row includes a school board meeting in Ida Belle's kitchen, a hand carved library door, a stained glass window and the sadness of the children when the school burned down



7 The Blue Cradle - The Blue Cradle, 72" x 30", tells the story of one homemade cradle that has served for 42 children. The name of each child who slept in the cradle is painted on the inside of the cradle. This community treasure has traveled from family to family on the Ridge. On the right side of the tapestry is the family gathered around the latest arrival. Left and middle are scenes of the making of the cradle by Steve Sanfield and of its various travels. The tapestry is bordered by a band of blue linen with the names and dates of each child embroidered in white thread.



8 South Yuba River - The River tapestry, 72" x 30", shows the wildness and grandeur of the Yuba River. Various species of fish swim at different depths. Insects abound in and out of the water. This is the river we cross to get to town, a place to swim and relax, and be inspired, a cherished place in any season. The bottom border shows our hope for the return of the salmon with exquisite stitches.



9 North San Juan Volunteer Fire Department - 72" x 30" The North San Juan Volunteer Fire Department was founded in 1862. It is now the North San Juan Fire Protection District, a special district in the County, but still a treasure for and of the Ridge community. Not only fires, but also medical emergencies, river rescues, and hazardous materials are encountered. The community is very proud of the skilled professionalism of the department and grateful for the safety the District provides the community. The main area is taken up with a wildland fire scene and teams of firefighters directed by the Fire Chief in the middle. The bottom row shows some of the activities of the fire department including the Mother's Day Scotch broom breakfast.



10 How We Live and Work Parties – The tapestry, 108" x 30", depicts a few owner built homes scattered around the Ridge community. Houses are characterized by reliance on hands on do-it-yourself, local materials. compact house design for energy efficiency, and minimal grading. Work parties helped families get the frame up and the roof on in time for winter. There are also scenes of road work by groups of people, the building of the Ring of Bone Zendo by volunteers.



11 Arts and Artisans - 96" x 30", includes 154 visual, fiber, food, glass, leather and conceptual artists, woodworkers, writers, musicians, and dancers including such notables as Arlo Acton, Steve Sanfield, Pulitzer prize winning poet Gary Snyder, and woodworkers Holly Tornheim and Robert Erickson whose works are in the Smithsonian collection. The Ridge has been fertile ground for the growth of the creative spirit. Undeterred by the constant demands of rural living, artists and artisans get the book written, the canvas stretched, the clay formed, the song sung.



12 The Winter Forest -The Winter tapestry, 72" x 30", is the final tapestry of the series and embodies all the acquired skills of the artisans, including the underlying artwork created by local artist Jennifer Rain Crosby. It depicts a winter scene of lower elevation plants on the right side moving up to higher elevation plants on the left side. It is a snowy evening at twilight with the moon rising in the left corner and the after glow of the sun fading into mauve in the right top side. The forest and the river are the heart of why Ridge dwellers live where they do. The Forest Tapestry gives a taste of the various differences in habitat from the lower elevations at 2000 feet to the higher areas at 4000 feet. The lower elevation mixed meadow and forest are on the right side of the tapestry and the higher elevations are illustrated toward the left side with larger denser trees. Many different species of plants and animals live at these different elevations.