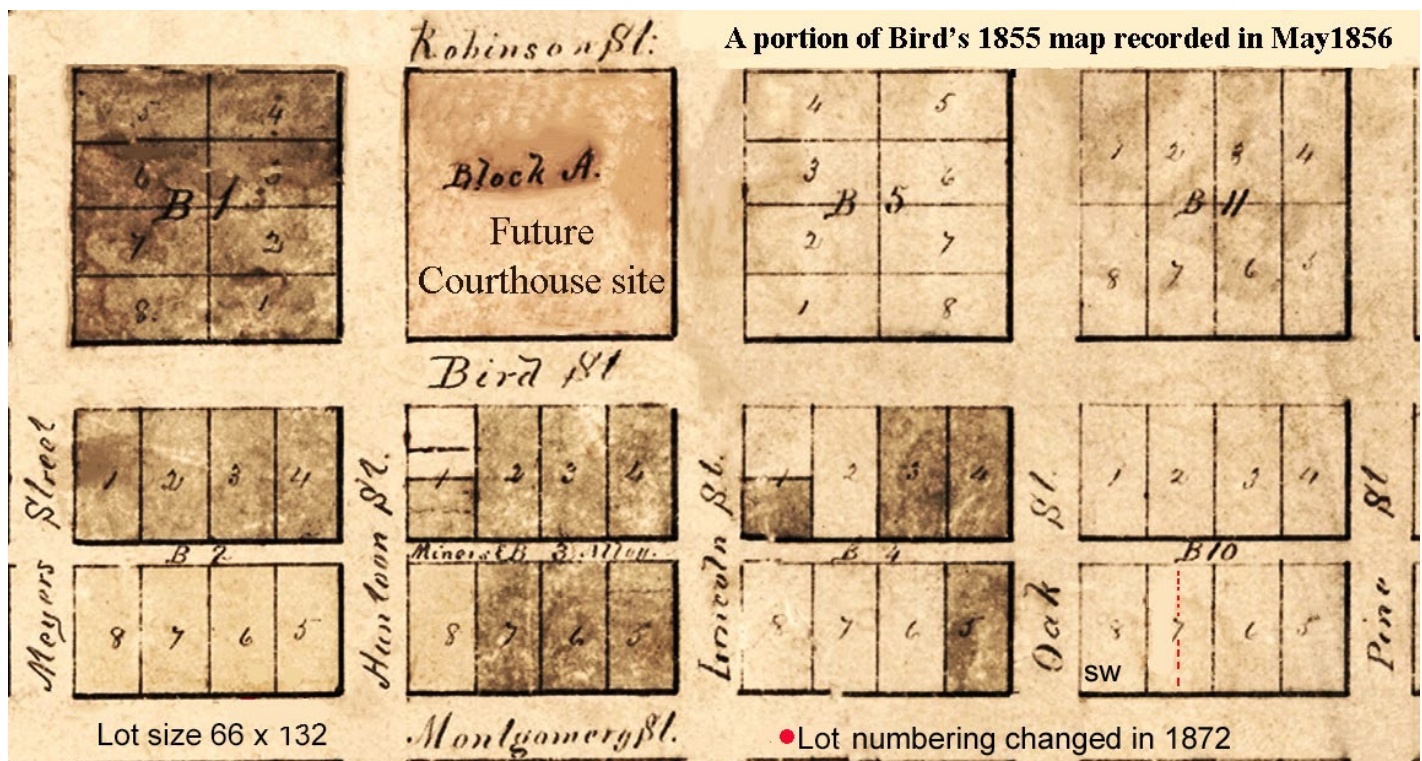## Oroville-(Ophir)

First called Ophir, gold was discovered there in 1849. It became a hub for miners heading North on the Feather River, including the North Fork, Middle Fork and South Fork of the River. The closest major supply post was located 27 miles south in Marysville. By 1853 Bidwell Bar, which was located north of Ophir at the junction of the forks, had become the largest town in Butte County and was made the County Seat. At the time, most of the mining towns along the Feather River were located in the foothills along the banks of the river and the terrain was not favorable to large population growth.

Ophir was an exception with large areas of relatively flat land. By 1853 several businesses had been established there. The town applied for a post office in 1854. At that time the name was changed from Ophir to Oroville as several other locations in California used some variation of Ophir for their name.

Ralph Bird was a miner in the area. He saw the potential for Oroville to become a trading hub to supply all the small mining towns along the river. In 1855 he secured a large portion of the land around Oroville, and he laid out a town plot map. He started selling lots for $100 each. At the intersection of Montgomery and Myers Streets on Bird's map, lots sold quickly and many businesses including hotels started opening up. Soon there was interest from businessmen in Marysville in the new town. They could see the advantage of a large supply center closer to the mines in Butte County and the town's inevitable growth. It reduced the distance to purchase supplies from 27 miles in Marysville to just a few miles in Oroville.

Oroville's growth caught the attention of the county supervisors at Bidwell Bar in 1856 and the County Seat was moved to Oroville in Nov 1856. By the end of 1858, the population of Oroville had increased to nearly 4,000 and it was the 5th largest town in California. The search for gold was an important driver of the town's economy through the 1920's.

Darker areas show lots with buildings in 1856, which became the business center

For more information about early Oroville see the Fall 2021 issue of the Diggin's available at the Archives.