Coal Town Boom and Bust

These quiet valleys once echoed with the huff of steam engines, the rumble of explosions, and the songs of Welsh miners. After the Gold Rush, five towns grew here around twelve coal mines that provided fuel for California's booming economy. Coal miners and their families settled in Nortonville, Somersville, Stewartville, Judsonville, and West Hartley. Besides work, they enjoyed activities such as baseball and bocce ball. They formed bands, choirs, and poetry clubs. Schools, churches, and businesses were built to serve the growing population.

When other sources of energy became available in the 1890s, the mines closed and residents moved away. Many buildings were dismantled and moved to nearby towns. Other than exotic trees and scattered artifacts, the abandoned townsites give few clues to their bustling past.