



WEST POINT

By JUDGE J. A. SMITH
(Born at West Point)

In 1844, Kit Carson, seeking a pass over the Sierra, came down the south side of the Mokelumne River canyon and finding the main Mokelumne River at flood stage, named the point where he had come the farthest west, West Point. Near what is now West Point, Carson crossed the Mokelumne River on the old Indian Ladder Bridge above Bald Rock and then proceeded easterly on the northerly side of the Mokelumne Canyon and discovered the pass, now known as Carson Pass.

With the discovery of gold in California miners soon came into the vicinity and discovered gold.

Louis Chicard of Stockton sent the first mule train into West Point loaded with all sorts of merchandise for barter. The following day when the Chicard mule train left West Point the pack saddles were laden with a large amount of pure gold.

Much of the gold shipped in early days from Volcano, Amador County, came from the placers of West Point.

West Point was early developed as a quartz mining locality. It had numerous small ledges, easily worked and West Point became known as a poor man's camp. A windlass, rope, giant powder, food and tools were all the miner needed to dig out gold. At first the quartz was ground in arrastre mills, the power being mules and then water.

Dr. George Fischer was an early doctor in the community and he had extensive holdings in lands, sawmills, ditches, road franchises and bridges.

Michael Schmidt was an early resident of the community and operated a whip sawmill at an early date. The Wickham brothers, Carsner brothers, Porteous family, Bardsley, Harris brothers, Henry, Herbert and Briggs families came at an early date to West Point. They came in most instances over the old Emigrant Road to Carson Valley. One branch of this road came directly into West Point. The first



OLDEST BUILDING — The old Fernando and Ferraro Store at the southwest corner of Main and Pine Streets is now the oldest building in West Point. Originally built and used as a store, a barber shop occupied a part of it for many years. It has also been used as a saloon and a post office and recently as a real estate office.

sawmill was located on this old Emigrant Road. Lumber was whip-sawed and used in the construction of the early buildings in the community.

There were several small communities that were a part of West Point. Sandy Gulch, southeast of West Point a few miles, was developed very early. There was an old store at this place that continued to run until about the turn of the century. The writer of this article was told by Judge Reed that he saw more gold stored in milk pans at Sandy Gulch than he saw at any other place during his early mining days. Two ditches brought water into Sandy Gulch. The original Sandy Gulch Ditch was used to mine the rich diggings of the gulch. This ditch came from the Middle Fork of the Mokelumne River. The owners at one time operated a sawmill

and a quartz stamp mill by the water from this ditch. Later, the so-called Kadish Ditch brought water from the same stream but at a higher elevation. The original Sandy Gulch Ditch took water as far west as the Woodhouse Mine, one of the oldest quartz mines in Calaveras County. Eventually the system was sold to the old Mokelumne Hill Ditch and later was purchased with the old water rights by the Calaveras Public Utility District which now brings water to Mokelumne Hill, San Andreas and the Calaveras Cement plant.

Two ditches also brought water into West Point for mining during the '50's. One came from Bear Creek and the other from the North Middle Fork of the Mokelumne River or Forrest Creek. One of these ditches is now in private ownership, the other belongs to the town of West Point and furnishes water to the community.

The Lockwood Mine, a mine not far from the town, constructed a ditch to bring water from Blue Creek to augment their system that took water from Bear Creek. This ditch has not been used for many years.

There has been quite a large amount of quartz mining done in and around west Point. The most notable of the mines being the Lockwood, Champion, Lone Star, Blazing Star, Keltz and many others. In addition, there has been considerable work done at Blue Mountain. The Heckendorn is the best known of the mines at Blue Mountain. Most of the streams were worked years ago for the placer gold. The new diggings near Bald Mountain having yielded a great amount of gold.

Other nearby small communities are Skull Flat, Bumerville, Camp Catarrah, Camp Flores and Big Flat.

The Miwok or Digger Indians have always maintained their homes in and around West Point. At one time they were said to number 10,000. They had headquarters at Sandy Gulch, where they bury their dead at present. They also had headquarters at Big Flat, and near the Lockwood Mine at Camp Spirito.

An old Indian named Leponso was for many years the Chief of the tribe of West Point Indians. At present Chief Fuller of Tuolumne County is chief of all the Digger Indians. The Indians have to a great extent given up their tribal relations and live very much like other people. The Indians of Calaveras County seemed to be of a low order. They made arrow heads, mortars to grind acorns, and some baskets. Their basket weaving was not of a high order. However, these baskets would hold water and could be used to cook the paste they made from acorns by dropping hot rocks into them. The early Indians gathered great quantities of grasshoppers when they were plentiful, and stored acorns for winter use. The acorn from the Black Oak seemed to be the acorn most sought after. In fact, the Indians from across the mountains made annual excursions to Calaveras County to gather the Black Oak acorns. They usually brought pine nuts for sale on this side of the mountains.

Great forests of sawmill timber has abounded in the West Point area and lumber has always been commercially cut from the whip-sawing days of Dr. Fischer, Michael Schmidt and the Wickham brothers, to the circular saw of David McCarty, Rowe & Jenkins, Warren Rose, Woodcock Brothers, Schaad Brothers, W. H. Mitchell Lumber Company, George C. Bruce, Eureka Mill and Lumber Company,



STREET SCENE—West Point in 1892, looking southerly on Main Street. The trees, now gone, were locust trees. —Photos courtesy of Artie Wilson.

and to the more recent cutting by Stockton Box Company and Associated Company with their modern band mills.

Attempts were made over the years to develop the vast timber resources of this part of Calaveras County. Transportation has been the great drawback until the coming of the hard surfaced road and chain saws and hauling by trucks.

Several attempts were made to float the logs down the Mokelumne River to mills constructed around the Lodi area. The Lodi Land and Lumber Company was the first company to attempt to float the logs. The logs were stranded along the banks of the stream and much litigation resulted from unpaid employees.

Later Van Buskirk Brothers came into the community and with agent, George C. Bruce, spent a great deal of time blasting the large rocks out of the Mokelumne for their attempt to float the logs to the Lodi area. They built a dam on Blue Creek not far from the dam that was used by Lodi Land and Lumber Company, filled it with logs, and made one attempt to float logs. This also ended in failure. It seems as though the river was too rugged and swift for floating logs. In addition the Gwin Mine and later a company organized in Calaveras County attempted to float mining timber for use in the Gwin Mine and in the deep mines in Jackson. This also failed.

West Point has always been a district where choice fruit can be raised. At Sandy Gulch a Mr. Harris had a very early nursery and it was from this nursery that many of the trees for the old orchards were secured.

The English walnut seems to do exceptionally well in the West Point area. Late varieties of nuts are planted and the heavy frosts are over before they come out in bloom. Several hundred acres of choice walnuts are in this region.

In the days that are past, West Point had many custom mills where the prospector could take his rock and have it ground. Most of the early prospectors had his rock packed on the backs of mules. Usually a load was called a "cargo" and it was the amount that was placed in an arrastre for one grinding. Usually it took about twenty-four hours to grind a batch of rock.

In the early days West Point had many Mexican resi-

dents. Most of them were experienced prospectors, having gained their knowledge and technique in their homeland.

West Point like most mining communities had its murderers and bad men. A member of Joaquin Murietta's gang made his home at West Point for many years. When he died without benefit of medical assistance, it is said his body bore evidence of many knife wounds.

Because there are so many streams near West Point, it has always been a favorable fishing area. Some of the smaller streams opening early and the later ones continuing to have good fishing as long as the season lasts. The Blue Mountain section has always been a favorite place for the deer and bear hunters.

It was early necessary to bridge the streams that communication might be had during the season of high water. There were several very high bridges in the community. A wire suspension bridge across the South Fork of the Mokelumne went down at one time when a herd of cattle was crossing it. The old Indian Ladder Bridge was replaced by a toll bridge. Later the crossing was made further up the stream and the old crossing abandoned. A modern concrete structure now bridges the stream.

Some of the old buildings are still standing even though the town has had disastrous fires as has most old mining towns.

The old store building at Sandy Gulch is gone. Only a part of the old cellar still stands.

The old Machu Building and the Frank Novella Building, both standing on Main Street and being built of adobe brick, have gone down.

The old wooden building at the corner of Main and Pine Streets is probably the oldest public building in the community. It has practically always been used as a store, although at other times it has had other uses.

At one time the Chinese resided in great numbers at West Point. They mined in the gulches and streams and worked the gravels after the whites had abandoned them. At one time they had a Joss House on Main Street, where punks were constantly kept burning. They also occupied part of Pine Street as well as North Main Street. There is no evidence left of the sections of the streets that they once occupied. They carried all their wood in on their backs and had a section of the public burial ground where they buried their dead. Later the bones were taken up and sent to China.

The first school in the West Point area is clouded in much doubt. It appears that there was a very early school at the top of the Middle Fork Hill in Sandy Gulch, at a place that was later called the Sign Boards. Children from both West Point and Sandy Gulch attended this school.

It was also stated that the first school at West Point was on the property now owned by Amy Sterling. The old building was supposed to have stood close to the Ditch near Mrs. Sterling's residence.

Later, the school house was on top of the hill from the Middle Fork Bridge and children from Sandy Gulch and West Point attended this school. The building was moved and the school houses were built at the foot of the hill. These buildings were destroyed by fire and, for the balance of the term school was conducted in the Methodist Church building and a building that belonged to T. R. Smith adjoining the church property. These buildings were used until new school buildings were provided about one-half mile

down the road toward the Middle Fork River at the same site occupied by the school buildings which were burned. Later, the buildings were erected at the present site of the school. The grounds on which the buildings are now erected are probably the finest school sites in the county.

For many years there was only one church building at West Point. The old Methodist Church building adjoining the present school property. Churches of other denominations were often held in the town hall. In recent years there has been a Christian Science Church and a Catholic Church in the neighborhood.

The first foundry ever erected in Calaveras County was built by Mr. A. Lascy, an early resident of the community. He built the foundry near his home on the Middle Fork of the Mokelumne River just above the present bridge. He made shoes and dies for stamp mills, principally. Mr. Lascy was an engineer and did a great deal of work surveying for the Government in Alaska in later years.

THE DISCOVERER OF MOSQUITO GULCH

A German named Fosterling claims to have been the discoverer of Mosquito Gulch, and the circumstances surrounding this settlement are as follows.

In 1849 Fosterling and several other Germans were mining at Rich Gulch Flat in Calaveras County. The "diggings" were extensive and rich.

The Americans in the camp decided to levy a tax of \$20 per month on foreigners. To escape payment of the tax the Germans quit Rich Gulch and moved further up in the mountains in search of new diggings where a tax was not imposed.

The company found good prospects in the gulch now called Mosquito Gulch and went to work. Their locations were soon discovered by the miners of Rich Gulch. This resulted in a rush of miners to the gulch and the whole country around was claimed by them.

Fosterling stated that never before or since had he seen mosquitos so large or so plentiful as they were in that gulch in 1849. As a result of this condition the place was named Mosquito Gulch, a name it bore until newcomers called the place Glencoe.

L. P. Terwilliger, an old resident of Calaveras County, stated that in the early fifties he was in the employ of the old Mokelumne Hill Ditch Company and the company had a sawmill near the present town of Glencoe. One day he was reading a novel in which there was a description of a place that was similar to Mosquito Gulch. He jumped up and exclaimed, "Boys, we're going to call this place Glencoe!" The name took and Mosquito Gulch became Glencoe.

The school district retained the name of Mosquito Gulch for many years. It was established March 19, 1864, from the upper portion of the Pleasant Springs School District. On April 5, 1953, the name was changed to the Glencoe School District.

The Eureka School District was formed on May 7 1866, from the Mosquito Gulch School District.

On March 3, 1941, the district was changed to the Rail Road Flat School District.

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The Calaveras County Historical Society meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at the Courthouse in San Andreas. Dinner meetings are held each quarter at different places in the county.

EDITORIAL

The members who were unable to attend the Murphys dinner meeting missed a very pleasant and interesting evening. The hospitality, food, and atmosphere in the dining room of the old Sperry and Perry (Murphys) Hotel was an appropriate setting for an interesting program. Our loyal and enthusiastic "old timer" member, Covert Martin, presented a selection of fifty pictures on historical landmarks in the Mother Lode from his extensive personal collection, built up from a long career as a commercial photographer in Stockton.

The Resolution, selecting our president, Judge Smith, for his years of service to the county was presented by Vice-President Amon Tanner and was an impressive part of the meeting. Judge Smith's surprise and happiness very nearly overcame his usual poise and self-assurance. The enthusiastic applause of the members to Judge Smith's responsive speech indicated the admiration and happiness felt by the group at this honor shown our president.

We must thank Covert Martin, also, for personally printing the beautiful Resolution.

At a special meeting of the O'Byrnes Ferry Bridge Committee at the March meeting of the Society, presided over by Archie Stevenot, plans were made to obtain the bridge for the Copperopolis Community Club, an incorporated organization. The chairman discussed the plans for moving the bridge by floating it on pontoons when the water in the reservoir reached the bridge level. It would be floated to a cove or inlet on the Calaveras side of the river where it would be a part of the recreational development of the new reservoir. With this optimistic report to the committee, everyone seemed encouraged to feel that the bridge would

be saved. If this is accomplished, Archie Stevenot will deserve the credit for it because his efforts have been tireless in its behalf.

Mrs. Ruby Taylor asks all members of the Society to save Sunday, August 4, for the dedication of the historical plaque at Rail Road Flat.

RESOLUTION OF THE CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WHEREAS, this man was born in Calaveras County and has been a loyal citizen of the County all his life, and

WHEREAS, he was a teacher of the youth in the schools of the County for a number of years, and

WHEREAS, for forty years he has served as judge of the Superior Court of Calaveras County, and

WHEREAS, for many years he was chairman of the Boy Scout Council in Calaveras County and hold the Silver Beaver Award in Scouting, and

WHEREAS, he has through his research and writing greatly increased the public knowledge of the history of the County, and

WHEREAS, he has helped organize the Calaveras County Historical Society and has been its only president during the first five years of its productive life, and

WHEREAS, throughout his dynamic and purposeful life he has been the friend and counselor of many of his fellow associates,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: That the Calaveras County Historical Society does honor Judge James Alexander Smith and show its confidence, respect, and admiration by officially designating him MR. CALAVERAS, and that the Secretary be instructed to have this Resolution properly inscribed and signed and presented to Judge James Alexander Smith.

The foregoing Resolution was passed and adopted by the Calaveras County Historical Society at a dinner meeting thereof held on the 24th day of January, 1957, at Murphys, California.

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