



EARLY HISTORY OF RAIL ROAD FLAT

By MRS. RUBY E. TAYLOR

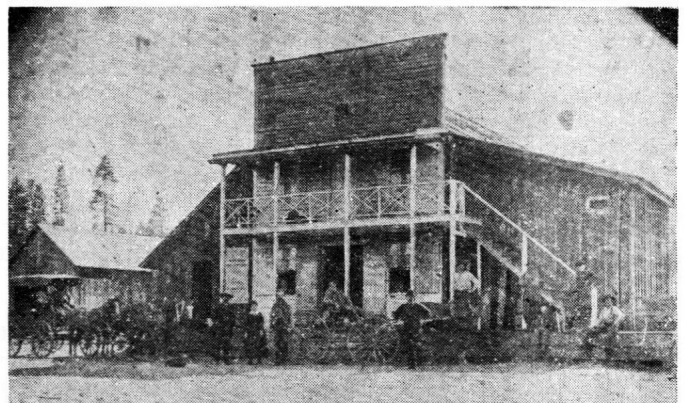
The town at 2,600 feet elevation was built on a flat surrounded by volcanic hills, Big Hill, Robber Hill, Pine Ridge, Fort Mountain, and John Batch Hill. It is only eight miles distant from Blue Mountain which has an elevation of between 6,500 and 7,000 feet. The Calaveras Big Trees are only 16 miles southeast of here by the old stage road that ran from Sacramento to Big Trees in the early days.

The present day James Hutchinson ranch house was a stopping place for the above stage in the early days. The stage would change horses and the drivers would eat and sleep here. This road traveled up the ridge between the South Fork of the Mokelumne and Calaveras Rivers, a trail traveled by the earlier settlers in 1850, coming from Jackson through Rail Road Flat before we had any roads.

The town of Rail Road Flat derived its name from the fact that an early day miner had built a wooden track across the flat on which an ore car was drawn by a mule. The rich gravel was hauled to reservoirs and washed for gold.

The rich placer diggings brought hundreds of people from near and far and each one had squatter's rights to a piece of ground on which he built a home. So many came that at one time the main street was lined with buildings on both sides of the street all the way across the flat to the intersection of the Independence and West Point roads. There was a three-story hotel, later owned by the Del Ray family, three stores, a butcher shop, bakery shop, a shoe maker's shop, Mrs. Ludy's restaurant, and seven saloons besides the numerous family homes. A school was located on a little knoll back of the town.

The place did not have a bonafide doctor. Mrs. Bede, a midwife, took care of the births and the citizens joined together to bury their dead. Most of these were buried in Independence Cemetery, about one mile north of Rail Road



THE EDWIN TAYLOR STORE at Rail Road Flat, from an old photo taken about 1887 by George H. Knight, early-day San Francisco photographer.

Flat, although several families had their own burial grounds on their own land. There are tombstones in the Independence Cemetery dated 1867.

So much placer mining needed more water for working the gravel. An engineer by the name of W. V. Clark, constructed a ditch which conveyed water from the South Fork of the Mokelumne River, taken out at the foot of Blue Mountain, all the way to a reservoir on his place about one-half mile south of Rail Road Flat on a hill with an elevation about 400 feet higher than the town.

This reservoir is on the property owned at present by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Buchanan. He sold this water to the miners and also used it for his own mining. At one time, Clark in his hydraulic mining was using over a hundred Chinese laborers. Some of the citizenry had Chinese cooks who were very loyal to the families they worked for. The famous China Spring was named after the Chinese having their camp located there.

Here are the names of some of the gravel mines: Henry

Seeman Gravel Mine, Conradi Gravel, Dan Reynolds Gravel, Taylor Placer Mine, Boire Gravel, Pickering Gravel Mine. All of these produced rich gravel on the surface and some of them were developed into deep mines in later years. The old Blue Mountain River Channel and the Independence Channel both ran through the edge of town.

The immediate acreage of Rail Road Flat was in litigation for 11 years in a lawsuit between Edwin Taylor and W. V. Clark. The Government awarded a patent to the land to Edwin Taylor in later years.

The Petticoat Reservoir was mined out as a placer mine and in later years it has been filled with water and used as a reservoir. It has been called recently "Blagen's Lake."

Another large reservoir at the head of the Calaveras River Valley was built about 1878 and was known as the McCarty Reservoir. Men worked with teams and received \$1.50 per day and furnished the team and boarded themselves and teams. A man without a team received \$1.00 per day and some laborers received 50c per day.

After the placer mining had slightly subsided, the quartz or hard rock mining began. One of the first quartz mines to be located was the Petticoat Mine, presently owned by Thomas Taylor. Petticoat Mine was so named because of the rich float rock which was discovered by three women. Mrs. Butterfield, one of these women, is still living in the county. J. S. Swank, H. S. Swank, and William Post worked the mine in 1860. For two decades it brought prosperity to the little town, and during the 1860's and 1870's it grew into quite a boom town.

Following are extracts from the Mining and Scientific Press, Vol. 15, No. 25, Page 39, 1867:

"There are a large number of claims at Railroad which are paying handsome dividends, keeping Hepburn and Company's mill constantly employed crushing."

Again in February, 1868, this same journal stated:

"The famous Petticoat lead located at Railroad Flat has been sold recently. We understand that a gentleman by the name of Said was the purchaser. As nothing further could be done without machinery, and the locators had not the means of procuring it, they concluded to sell."

The April, 1868 issue stated:

"Mr. Said, who purchased the famous 'Petticoat' lead, has erected steam hoisting works and has a large number of hands at work in the mine. The shaft has reached a depth of 30 feet and the rock being taken out will pay at the rate of \$100 per ton. On Saturday last, we were shown the amalgam taken from six tons of 'Petticoat' quartz at Railroad Flat. It assayed \$612."

The September 5, 1868, issue stated:

"The 'Petticoat' Mine at Railroad Flat, 'pans out' better than that indispensable article of female attire ever was known to do before. Some rock recently crushed from that lead yielded \$150 per ton. As the proceeds of a run of about two weeks with eight stamps, Mr. Said brought to this place yesterday 102 pounds of gold dust."

Mr. Said, owner and superintendent of the Petticoat Mine, was shot and killed by robbers on the Ridge Road while taking bullion from the Petticoat Mine to the Mokelumne Hill express office in March, 1870. The mine suspended operations for nearly two months after which a new superintendent was installed and the mine continued paying dividends for many more years.

The Wolverine or Big Mine was another very rich hard rock mine in this section and was discovered in the 1860's.

Later hard rock mines were the Swiss Mine, discovered by Leon Ponge; Fine Gold Mine, discovered by J. B. Guillemin; Poe Mine by Adam Poe; Dutch Mine; Sanderson Mine located on the present property of Amalia Stotts; Keystone Mine located on the present property of Delbert Seeman; Comet Mine; Bald Eagle; Herzer Mine, located by John Herzer; Mikado Mine.

The Sunnyside Mine, located on the present Hofeditz property, once owned by Walter Doe and Will Cook, was sunk to a depth of 35 feet. At that time Walter Doe sold this part of the mine to Perry Lamb for \$5.00 The very next day pay dirt was discovered and \$2,600 was taken out of a pocket. After hand mortaring it out the fines were shipped to the smelter.

Besides the mining industry there was farming, ranching, fur trapping, and saw milling. The first saw mill was owned by Sam Doke in 1860. D. McCarty and W. Clark had saw mills here later. Some very fine lumber was sawed in these mills. The old Taylor store which has been standing since 1867, is evidence of the first class lumber and also the first class workmanship by carpenters who had only hand tools to do all their planing and finishing work. Edwin Taylor, Sr., an enterprising merchant had constructed a large two-story building between other buildings in 1867. Here he ran a first class general merchandise store, selling everything obtainable from silks and satins to indispensable hardware and groceries. He helped organize I. O. O. F. Independence Lodge No. 158 and built the lodge room over his general merchandise store. This was one of the older lodges in Calaveras County. Later it joined with the West Point Lodge.

There had been a post office here earlier in January, 1857, with a George W. Angier as postmaster, but, for unknown reasons, it was discontinued the following year. It probably paid so poorly no one wished to bother with it.

There being no post office here in 1867, Edwin Taylor petitioned the Government and had a post office established. He served as postmaster until the time of his death in 1913. The position of the postmaster has been in the Taylor family until the present time.

Calamities also hit this little mining town. In 1880 a scourge of fever epidemic hit the town and a large part of the population died. Doctors had to be brought in from far away, and it was even hard to get enough people to nurse the sick ones. Many people left town hurriedly, never to return. Some moved their homes away. Jerome Burt moved his home to Glencoe, where he opened a store in later years. Mrs. Edwin Taylor died with this fever leaving a husband and four small children. In time some of the miners blew up two reservoirs on the edge of town with dynamite. It was thought that the reservoirs were breeding mosquitos which might be causing the fever to be so prevalent. After this, the epidemic subsided, but the town never did build up to its former size again.

In 1884 there was a killing in the Taylor Store. A man named Lampson, who ran a butcher shop about three miles from town, came into the Taylor Store one evening and an argument started with a young man named Mitchel Lancaster. The argument wound up in a fight in which Lancaster was hit with a stove leg. Lampson's 17-year-old son was outside the store in a wagon with his mother. He

rushed to his father's aid carrying a large butcher knife with which he stabbed Lancaster through the back, puncturing the liver. Lancaster was carried to a back room and given first aid but bled to death before a doctor could be brought from Mokelumne Hill to attend to him. Lampson was afterward convicted and sent to prison.

Early settlers of the 1850's were J. S. Swank, H. S. Swank, Henry Seeman and wife, Marianne Gauchat, Abe Pickering, Richard McNamara, Sam Doke, William M. Post, Jim Gay and Henry Bingham.

In the 1860's came Edwin Taylor, W. Sundemeyer, Erastus Houston, Sam M. Zane, E. A. Lewis, Phyletus Lewis, John Batchelder, Joe Getchel, John Doe, Sterling Lancaster, D. McCarty, Ira H. Reed, Dan Conradi, J. Lampson, Elias Fields, Jim Barlow and John Bach.

In the 1870's and 1880's were John Herzer, Henry Bosse, Winklers, Louis Fuchs, Armand Laidet, Jesse Lester, Dan Pillsbury, J. B. Guillemin, and Frank Buyck.

A large round house was located on the school house flat above town where thousands of Indians congregated each fall on their way from the upper Sierra down to the valley where they would live in the winter time. They would hold pow wows which lasted several weeks while they camped on the flat around the round house. They were of the Digger Tribe and Chief Monkey reigned over the round house pow wows for many years. Several years ago the Diggers' name was changed to Miwoks so there are no more Diggers. Chief Fuller in Sonora is chief of the Miwoks since our Chief Pedro Carni died.

They fished and hunted and in the surrounding country the Indian women would gather hundreds of bushels of acorns for winter food.

Mining was brought to a close at the time of the first World War. During the second World War, the logging and saw mill industry increased our population, bringing in many people from the Middle Western States.

At present we have the logging and saw mill industry, a little mining, some farming and cattle raising, many summer homes and recreations such as hunting and fishing.

THE WHEAT HOME AT DOUBLE SPRINGS

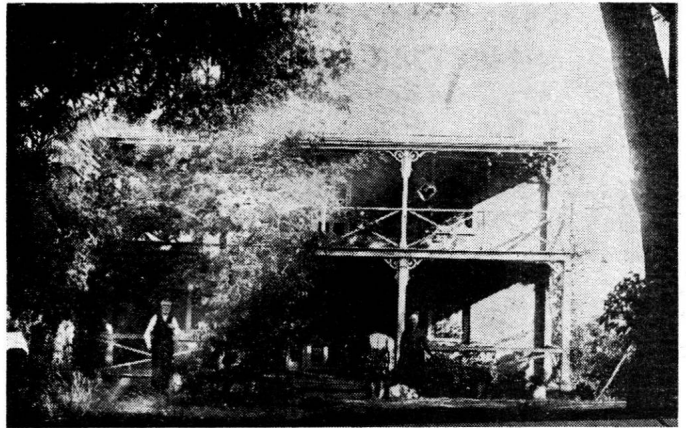
The old Wheat home at Double Springs was built by Alexander Wheat in the year 1860.

It is built of native sand stone taken from the Andrew Young Ranch which was about one and one-half miles from the Wheat home. The sand stone was hewn out by hand in blocks of various sizes, each stone decorated with a tool mark. The face of the stones on the front of the house are edged with a border to represent a panel.

There are eleven rooms in the home and the walls are twenty inches thick.

The house was built by a man named Watt, a native of Scotland. He later built the Late home in Valley Springs and the Hill home near Camanche. He also built the Wildermuth home near Pardee Dam and two smaller houses on the Young property.

Mr. and Mrs. A. R. Wheat celebrated their Golden Wedding in 1889, and Mr. and Mrs. Joe Gillam were married in the old home in 1871 and celebrated their Golden Wedding there in 1921. There has been two family weddings



THE WHEAT HOME AT DOUBLE SPRINGS — The old Wheat home at Double Springs was built by Alexander R. Wheat in the year 1860. Pictured above are Mr. and Mrs. Wheat standing in front of the home as it was many years ago. At the present time seven generations have lived continuously in the home.

there in the later years.

In 1881, William Campbell came from Iowa to California to make his home with his daughter, Mrs. Wheat.

Mr. and Mrs. Wheat then were the second generation.

In 1902, Mr. and Mrs. Joe Gillam moved there to make their home, making the third generation; then Mr. and Mrs. Almar Smith made the fourth; Mr. and Mrs. Percy Hunt, the fifth; Mildred and Wilma Hunt, the sixth; and Jody Taylor is the seventh generation to live continuously in the old Wheat home at Double Springs.

In 1851 Alexander Boileau, David F. Schall and William W. Barkman were merchants in business at Double Springs, Calaveras County, California.

In December, 1850, Joseph Palmer sold to Peter and Noah Blossom a one-half interest in a store building and stock of goods at Winter Bar on the Mokelumne River for \$5,259.

The so-called "Indian Play Ground" was located on the North Fork of the Calaveras River, not far from the old town of Jesus Maria. This name appears in the Calaveras County Records as early as June, 1851.

In the early records of Calaveras County, "Vallecito" is often written "Biacita."

On June 6, 1851, George M. Nerie and Alexander Jenkins sold the bridge across the North Fork of the Calaveras River, which was known as the second crossing from Stockton to E. L. Stevenson.

On June 4, 1851, McLean, Jeffry & Co., gave notice in the records of Calaveras County that they claimed and had claimed for upward of two years, for the purpose of a ferry, 500 yards of land on the Stanislaus River, beginning at a large oak tree opposite Jackass Gulch and running up the river to the first falls.

OFFICERS OF CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

San Andreas, California

Judge J. A. Smith, President San Andreas
 Amon Tanner, Vice-President Murphys
 Paul Lewis, Second Vice-President Mountain Ranch
 Sadie Hunt, Secretary Valley Springs
 Ella Thompson, Treasurer San Andreas

Editor of Las Calaveras Coke Wood, Murphys

Board of Directors: Archie Stevenot, Sonora; Lester March, Burson; Ed Leonard, Angels Camp; Mrs. Hattie Hertzig, San Andreas; and Ruby Taylor, Rail Road Flat.

Las Calaveras is published quarterly by the Calaveras County Historical Society for the benefit of the members. Membership in the society is \$4.00 a year. Non-members may obtain copies of Las Calaveras for \$1.00 a copy. The historical material in this bulletin is not copyrighted and anyone is invited to use it. Mention of the source will be appreciated.

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

Congratulations to the new officers of the society which were elected at the July pot-luck dinner at Double Springs. Amon Tanner was moved up to First Vice-President and Paul Lewis, who has done such fine work in the promotion of historical markers in the county, was elected to Second Vice-President. Three new members were chosen to the Board of Directors—Ed Leonard, of Angels Camp; Lester March of Burson; and Mrs. Hattie Hertzig of San Andreas. All these newly elected officers have been interested and active in the society and will give new enthusiasm to the program.

* * * * *

Those who missed the Double Springs meeting in July, failed to hear a very fine discussion by Mr. and Mrs. R. R. Stuart on having fun collecting books and items on California and the West. Of course, the pleasant surroundings in the garden of the old Wheat ranch and the charming hospitality of Mrs. Wimer and Sadie and Percy Hunt added a great deal to the pleasure of the evening. This July meeting has become the top event of the society's schedule.

* * * * *

Why can't something definite be done to preserve the old covered bridge at O'Bryne's Ferry? That is the question so many people are asking. With historical and civic organizations from all over Central California becoming concerned about the loss of this bridge by having the site flooded by the construction of a reservoir by the Oakdale-South San Joaquin Irrigation District, it seems as if someone in a position of authority would have enough imagination to work out a plan for preserving this historic and colorful old structure. The chief responsibility lies with the irrigation district and the Boards of Supervisors of Calaveras and Tuolumne counties.

The Calaveras County Historical Society has had a committee under the chairmanship of Archie Stevenot, studying the problem for two years and many suggestions have been made for preserving the structure. The big question is who pays the cost of transporting this bridge to another site? This should not be an insurmountable obstacle if enough people and organizations really want the bridge saved. The Calaveras Historical Society will do all it possibly can for this project. What will the Garden Clubs, State Division of Beaches and Parks, Historical Societies, service clubs, irrigation districts, and boards of supervisors do? This is a challenge that every organization in the Mother Lode and in Central California should consider.

* * * * *

The committee on planning an essay contest on local history in the high schools and elementary grades reported at the last meeting. In general the plan is to give prizes of \$15, \$10 and \$5 for the best essays on local Calaveras County history. A year's membership in the Historical Society will also be a part of the reward. The requirement is that the material be new in that it has not been previously published, at least in complete form. The purpose of the contest is to stimulate interest on the part of our students in local history and in the Historical Society. Many county historical societies have active groups of junior members that make worth while contributions to the research and study of the societies. This education program is an important part of the work of any local historical group. Good luck to Mrs. Hattie Hertzig and her committee.

Congratulations to the Tuolumne County Chamber of Commerce on sponsoring the organization of a Tuolumne County Historical Society. This long-overdue project was gotten underway at a meeting in the county courthouse in September. A large and enthusiastic group attended the meeting presided over by Don Segerstrom. A temporary organization was planned with Don Segerstrom as chairman and Mary Burgin as secretary. A dinner meeting has been planned for the near future. May we extend to our friends across the Stanislaus our very best wishes for a successful future. We will be happy to cooperate with them in any way possible and anticipate some pleasant joint meetings to work on common projects.

* * * * *

Our very capable treasurer, Mrs. Ella Thompson, reported at the last meeting the amount of \$453.54 in the treasury.

NEW MEMBERS

A hearty welcome to the following new members of the society:

- Mrs. Fred D. Tuck, Box 453, Angels Camp
- Mrs. Violet L. Cuslidge, Box 525, San Andreas
- Mrs. Jennie N. Hollingshead, West Point
- Mrs. Melville R. Jacobs, Valley Springs
- Mrs. Mary Dragomanovich, Box 634, San Andreas
- Mr. Ross M. Durland, Box 791, San Andreas
- Mrs. Grace Reinking, Valley Springs
- Mrs. Maude Poynor, Rt. 1, Box 218, Escalon
- Mr. George Pratchner, 112 Van Ness, Santa Cruz