

HISTORICAL BULLETIN

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CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY San Andreas, California

Judge J. A. Smith, PresidentSan Andreas
Coke Wood, Vice-PresidentMurphys
Sadie Hunt, SecretaryValley Springs
Ella Thompson, TreasurerSan Andreas
Board of Directors: George Poore, Mountain Ranch; Amon
Tanner, Murphys; Frances Lombardi, Mokelumne Hill;
John Squellati, San Andreas.

Editor of Bulletin, Coke WoodMurphys

EDITORIAL

In this first issue of the Calaveras County Historical Society **Bulletin** it seems necessary to trace the brief history of the organization and state some of the hopes for the future.

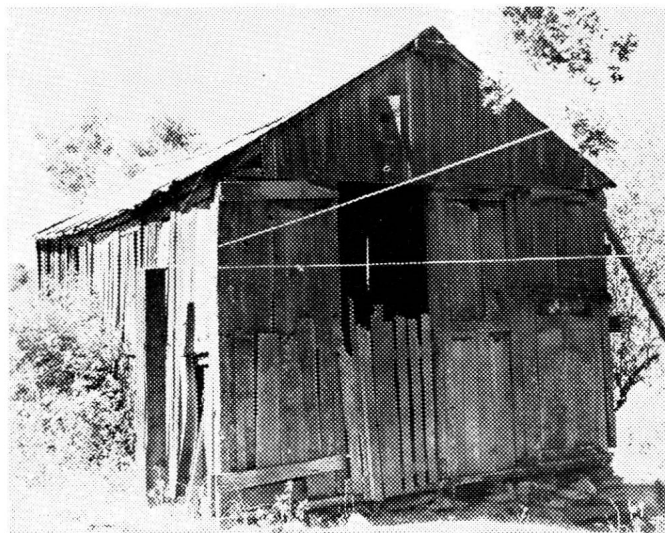
The Society came into being through the efforts of the Calaveras Grange who sponsored the formation of the organization as a part of its community service activity. A committee consisting of Sadie Hunt, Amon Tanner, George Poore, and Coke Wood, was created and given authority to draw on the treasury of the Grange to the amount necessary to get the Historical Society organized. Once the Society was established the Grange would withdraw and leave the organization entirely independent.

The first public meeting for the purpose of organizing the Historical Society was called in April to meet in the library of the Calaveras Union High School at San Andreas. There were twelve people present at this meeting and all were enthusiastic about the formation of an historical society. Mr. Covert Martin greatly encouraged the group by telling of the success of the San Joaquin Pioneer and Historical Society. A monthly meeting date was agreed upon and plans made to draw up a set of by-laws. These were drawn up at the June meeting and adopted at the July meeting. According to the statement of purpose in the by-laws, the Historical Society was organized for the purpose of stimulating research and preserving the history of Calaveras county.

A nominating committee was appointed at the July meeting to bring in a list of candidates for the offices of the society. The report of this committee was unanimously approved at the August meeting and the following officers elected: President, Judge J. A. Smith; Vice-President, Coke Wood; Secretary, Sadie Hunt; Treasurer, Ella Thompson; Board of Directors, George Poore, Amon Tanner, Frances Lombardi and John Squellati.

At the September meeting in the court room at San Andreas, Judge Smith presided. The regular monthly meet-

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Calaveras County's First Court House

EARLY CALAVERAS HISTORY

by Judge J. A. Smith

Calaveras county, one of the original 27 counties of the State, was organized at the 1849-50 session of the California State Legislature. At one time it embraced a portion of Amador, Alpine and Mono Counties. In 1854, Amador county was created from Calaveras and El Dorado counties, and parts of Calaveras county was taken to form Fresno county in 1856, Mono county in 1861 and Alpine county in 1864.

Calaveras is a Spanish word meaning skull. This name was first given to the river because of the great quantities of human skulls found along the lower reaches of the river.

The first officers of the county were: William Fowle Smith, County Judge; Colonel Collier, County Clerk; A. B. Mudge, Treasurer; H. A. Carter, Prosecuting Attorney.

Pleasant Valley, better known as Double Springs, was designated as the first county seat. Court was first held in a large tent, and later a small court house was erected from camphor wood imported from China. The old building is still standing at Double Springs.

The county seat was moved to Jackson in 1850 where it remained until 1852. (Jackson was at that time in Calaveras County.) In 1852 the county seat of Calaveras county was moved to Mokelumne Hill where it remained until 1863. After an election in 1863 San Andreas was declared to be the county seat. Legal action followed this election, and it was not until 1866 that the county seat was actually moved to San Andreas where it has since remained.

The Calaveras Chronicle, the first weekly newspaper published in California, was first published on October 28, 1851, at Mokelumne Hill.

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

President J. A. Smith

History is a record of past events. Many counties in the State of California have their past events preserved in a written history of the county. This is not true of the county of Calaveras as its history has never been written.

Located in the center of the gold mining district of California Calaveras county is rich in history, tradition, romance, and lore. The early growth and development of the State of California to a great extent took place in the gold mining districts and Calaveras county contributed its full share. Many persons who later became leaders in the State at one time were gold miners in Calaveras county.

It is late to get full particulars of many of the early events in the history of the county. The pioneers and Argonauts have gone to their reward. Much valuable material is lost.

However, many descendants of the early residents of Calaveras county are still living, and it is possible to collect from them a vast fund of early history of the county. Many of the issues of early newspapers are no longer in existence, but some of these early newspapers are available in museums and public libraries.

The prime purpose of the Calaveras County Historical Society is to collect and preserve for posterity the early history of Calaveras county.

It is inevitable that in a work of this magnitude, the execution of which will be in many hands, there will be many errors and omissions. However, it will be the constant aim of the Calaveras County Historical Society to discriminate between the true and the false, to the end that the work of the Society will reflect a true account of events in Calaveras county and that as much as possible of its history will be preserved.

EDITORIAL

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ing of the Society was set for the fourth Thursday of each month. Plans were also made for a membership drive and for the charter night dinner to be held at the historic Murphys Hotel on October 23. It was decided that anyone joining the Society by that date should be listed as a charter member. It was also agreed that a quarterly **Bulletin** should be published, the first issue to be presented at the October meeting.

With the publication of this first **Bulletin**, the plans and efforts of those who have been interested are realized. The Calaveras County Historical Society has been well launched on a career which we hope will be long and successful in preserving the history of this romantic region in the heart of the Mother Lode. We invite all who are interested to join with us in this worthy project by becoming members and participating in the monthly meetings and contributing material for the **Bulletin**. C.W.

GREETINGS FROM KNOWLAND

CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

San Francisco California

September 30, 1952

Calaveras County Historical Society,
Murphys, California.

Friends:

On behalf of the California Historical Society I wish to congratulate the citizens of your county in organizing the Calaveras County Historical Society. We wish you the best of success, not only in the organization of the society, but in the issuance of a quarterly bulletin which you propose to publish.

Few, if any, counties in the state have taken a greater interest in having their historic spots registered as State landmarks. During the centennial years quite a number of bronze plaques were placed through the activity of the people of your county.

Rest assured that the California Historical Society will be happy at any time to aid you in your objectives. The best of luck to your organization.

Very sincerely,

CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
J. R. Knowland, President.

EARLY CALAVERAS HISTORY

(Continued from page one)

The first grove of Big Trees, "Sequoia Gigantea," discovered in California was the Calaveras Grove of Big Trees. These were located in 1852 by A. T. Dowd, a hunter for the Union Water Company which was at that time building an aqueduct from the Stanislaus River to Murphys.

The largest gold nugget found in the United States was taken from the Morgan Mine at Carson Hill in November, 1854. When weighed on Adams Express Company's gold scales in Stockton, it balanced the scales at 214 pounds and eight ounces, Troy.

The first three story building erected in the interior of California was in Mokelumne Hill.

Calaveras county is famous for its lode and placer mines, and for many years it was the principal copper producing county in California. Cement production from its vast limestone deposits has become one of the county's major industries in recent years.

The following places were early day mining communities: Angels Camp, Fourth Crossing, Mokelumne Hill, Calaveritas, Old Gulch, Douglas Flat, Vallecito, Murphys, Sheep Ranch, San Antone, Rich Gulch, Campo Seco, Copperopolis, West Point, Glencoe, Middle Bar, Carson Hill, Robinson's Ferry, Jesus Maria, Mountain Ranch, El Dorado, North Branch, Camanche, Railroad Flat, Blue Mountain City, Telegraph City, Petersburg, Gwin Mine and Jenny Lind.

John W. Robinson and Stephen Mead were licensed by the Court of Sessions of Calaveras county on August 13, 1850 to maintain a ferry on the Stanislaus River at Robinson's Ferry.



Three-story I. O. O. F. Hall—Mokelumne Hill

ODD FELLOW'S BUILDING

by Frances Lombardi

One of the oldest buildings still in use in Calaveras County and the first three-story building in the interior of California is the Odd Fellows Building in Mokelumne Hill. The lot on which the building is located was sold to Adams and Company, bankers, by the Mokelumne Hill Canal and Mining Company for the sum of \$1950 on September 8, 1854, shortly after a fire had laid waste a good part of the town.

The company at once erected a two-story stone building on the lot. However, because of claims against the property, action was taken in the District Court against the property, and it was sold and deeded by Sheriff Charles A. Clarke to John Sinclair on February 3, 1856, for the sum of \$7100. On May 9, 1856, John Sinclair sold the property to Dr. Lewis Soher for the sum of \$8500, and on April 13, 1860, Soher sold the property to the Mokelumne Hill Lodge No. 44, I. O. O. F. for \$4500. Dr. Soher held a note on the building for \$1350, and the Odd Fellows paid it off at the rate of \$50 a month, plus 3% interest.

The first Odd Fellows lodge in Mokelumne Hill was instituted on September 20, 1855, and for the first five years rented hall space from the Masons. When they took over the I.O.O.F. building in April, 1860, the construction of a third floor began. It was determined that the best way to gain entrance to the third floor would be to move the stairway back in the entry hall and put a rear staircase within four feet of the north wall. A reception room and ante room was built on one side and to the rear of the hall. It was about thirty feet long and twenty-four feet wide, running east and west. The windows next to the United State House were walled up to make the building safe in case of fire.

A platform was built on each end of the hall and a lamp was ordered hung on the front just under the top ledge and in about the center. The hall was lighted with

four coal oil lamps.

The building was rented to several other lodges and groups, such as Wells Fargo Express, George Mutts, A. C. Adams, the Free and Accepted Masons, Lone Star Encampment, Good Templars and the Freemans. On July 4, 1860, the hall was decorated on the outside from top to bottom in keeping with the celebration put on by Engine Number One of the Mokelumne Hill Fire Department.

D. L. Morrell was the contractor to build the third floor and to make other repairs on the building. Thomas Magee did the cornice work. Dr. Soher presented the flag which was flown from a pole donated by C. W. Carpenter.

In April, 1861, the Odd Fellows dedicated the new three-story building on the anniversary of their ownership in a celebration, joined by the people of the town, which was appropriate for such an important event, as the completion of the construction of the first three-story building in the interior of California. A grand ball was given with tickets priced at \$6.00. The supper was \$1.50 a plate.

In 1862 the building was painted on the outside with cement, and the roof was fixed with zinc roofing. It was then insured for \$7500 with four different insurance companies.

The desks you can see in the hall today were bought in 1862.

On November 1, 1860, the first Odd Fellow to sign the charter, W. C. Ferguson, passed away and was buried in the Protestant cemetery in Mokelumne Hill.

ANGELS MINE DISASTER

by J. A. SMITH

It was a sad holiday season in the mining community of Angels Camp, Calaveras county, California, in 1889, for on Sunday, the 22nd day of December of that year, before noon, at the Utica Mine in the town of Angels Camp, occurred the most fearful and heartrending accident that ever happened in the county. Seventeen men lost their lives.

The usual mining crew had been laid off for the day in order to do some timbering.

As the quartz was extracted from the vein, which was 30 to 35 feet in width, huge timbers twenty to thirty inches in diameter were placed to hold the ground.

It had been a season of heavy rain and as a result the pressure was increased on the timbers, causing them to crush.

Twenty men were at work timbering and only three of them escaped. The men were in the stope at the 400 foot level, when without the least warning the roof of the level dropped with a crash upon the men covering them up and killing them instantly.

Three men made their escape through the South shaft, there being an opening between the North and South shafts. The cave occurred between the two shafts. The men who escaped were not in the stope at the time of the cave, but were south of the cave area. When they heard the crash they ran to the South shaft and made their escape by way of ladders and gave the alarm.

Usually there were 70 men on the shift, and the death

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GREETINGS FROM FOUNDATION

From Rockwell D. Hunt, Director California History Foundation, College of Pacific

The California History Foundation, at the College of Pacific, salutes the newly-formed Calaveras County Historical Society. A hearty welcome! Speaking personally, permit me, as one of the oldest students of California history, to extend felicitations and very best wishes to one of the youngest local historical societies.

It is highly gratifying, in an age of hustle and bustle, of domestic strife and world tensions, to note the chartering of another local historical society, with every promise of enjoying a successful and significant career. Here is a voluntary, cooperative enterprise. The older, well organized historical societies of the state will wish to join with the California Historical Foundation in extending encouragement and practical assistance to the Calaveras County Historical Society.

This Society is most favorably located to perform an interesting and important service to the State. It is not too late to collect historical documents, such as diaries, account books, old programs, newspapers, and photographs; also, artifacts and relics illustrative of the life and activities of early days. All these should be carefully preserved—which suggest the cultural value of the local museum.

Among the functions of the local historical society prominent mention should be made of the regular meetings, these afford excellent social opportunities. Carefully prepared papers will be presented by members, and speakers from outside will be invited to address the Society. The tradition of an Annual Pilgrimage may be developed. There will be celebrations of special events, with appropriate pageantry and ceremony. Not least come publications, which will reflect some of the best and most useful work of the Society.

On behalf of the California History Foundation, and on my own personal account, I am delighted to greet the Calaveras County Historical Society on Charter Night, and wish for it a long, useful career. R. D. Hunt

SEND IN YOUR MATERIAL

The Calaveras County Historical Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the study and preservation of local history. All who are interested in this subject are invited to become members. The dues are four dollars a year for individuals, eight dollars for clubs, and one dollar for junior members. Please send dues to the Treasurer at San Andreas and story material to the Editor at Murphys.

L. Martin and Aristede L. Pench were licensed to maintain a ferry at Middle Bar on the Mokelumne River on June 5, 1850 by the Court of Sessions of Calaveras county

Have you a question about Calaveras County history? Send the questions to the Editor and we'll try to find and publish the answer.

GREAT MINE DISASTER AT ANGELS

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list would have included many more but for the fact that most of the men had been laid off while the timbering was being caught up.

The mine was well timbered and everything done to make it safe for the miners, but from some unaccountable cause, probably the wet and rainy condition that prevailed for some time, the ledge being in a formation streaked with talcose, and this becoming wet loosened the vein.

At the time of the accident the mine was the property of Hayward and Hobart.

Thomas Corwin who first gained the surface after the accident gave the alarm.

Seventeen men were buried in the mine, namely: Thomas Knucky, George Williams, the timber boss, Jno. Bray, B. Segarley, Paul Owlovich John Bioletto, John Toboco, C. A. Pollard, Michael Bronzich, Nick Susich, Peter Perena, Carlo Visetti, and ———— Sears.

Thomas Corwin, Daniel Danielson and August Anderson were the men who escaped through the South shaft.

The bodies of Michael Bronzich and James Martin were not recovered until about 12 years after the accident. The bodies of the other men had been recovered at odd times in the meantime.

NOTE:—The material for this article was given me by August May and Albert Prothero of Angels Camp, who resided at Angels Camp at the time of the accident.

DEAD BROKE MINING COMPANY

Calaveras county like other sections in the mining region acquired many colorful and amusing names during the early mining period. There are such places as Slab Ranch, Los Muertos Creek, Nigger Hill, Buster's Gulch, Whiskey Gulch, Squaw Hollow, and Skunk Misery, but one of the most amusing names given to a mining company was that of the Dead Broke Mining Company, which was located in the Gopher Mining District, east of Hog Hill on the lode known as the Collier Lode. This apparently was in the area known as Collierville and is a few miles east of Murphys.

The Old Timers Museum in Murphys has one of the Dead Broke mining certificates for 150 shares assigned to Mrs. T. Mersfelder.

The company was incorporated on April 15, 1863, with the principal place of business at Stockton, San Joaquin county. The capital stock of the company was for \$48,000 and consisted of 2400 shares at \$20 each. The duration of the company was for fifty years.

There were sixteen original claims, 150 long by 300 feet wide which were located in a double line so that the total area of the claims was 600 feet wide by 1200 feet long.

The president of the company was Christopher Grat-tan, and the secretary was August Wiehe. A. E. Meyer and the two officers made up the board of directors. L. M. Cutting, prominent pioneer of Murphys apparently served as secretary at one time, as his name appeared on the incorporation papers found in the archives in San Joaquin county.