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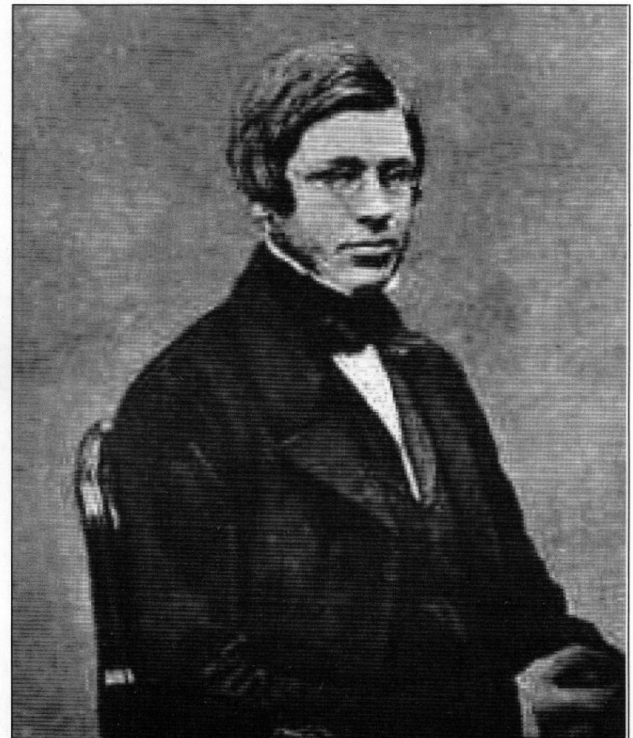
CHARLES DARWIN, ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE, EVOLUTION AND THE MAN AFTER WHOM THE CALAVERAS COUNTY TOWN OF WALLACE IS NAMED

By Sal Manna

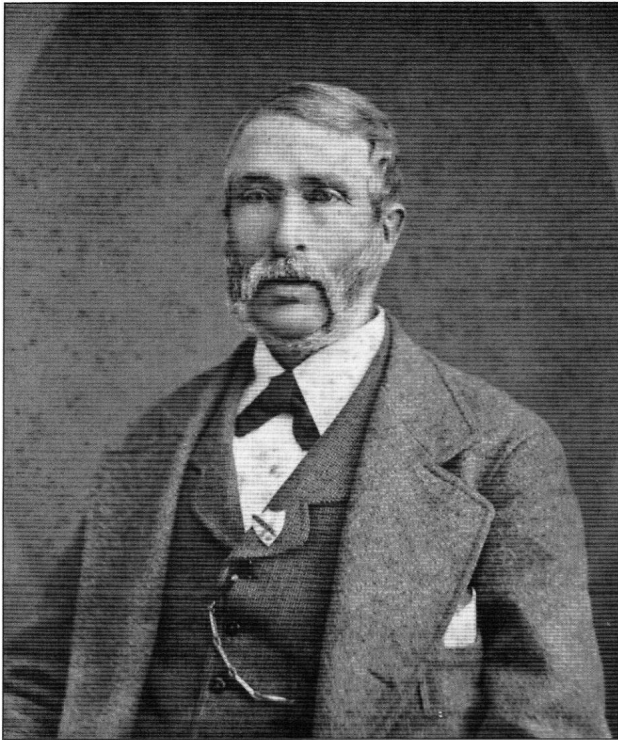
“Truth is born into this world only with pang and tribulations, and every fresh truth is received unwillingly. To expect the world to receive a truth, or even an old truth, without challenging it, is to look for one of those miracles which do not occur.”

—Alfred Russel Wallace,
The Outlook, New York (1913)

For nearly 40 years, brothers John and Alfred Russel Wallace were separated by an ocean and a continent. John emigrated from England to Gold Rush California; younger brother Alfred ventured to the Amazon to collect butterfly specimens. John became San Joaquin County Surveyor, chief engineer of the San Joaquin & Sierra Nevada Railroad and the namesake of the Calaveras County town of Wallace. Alfred became one of the most famous naturalists of his time, the man who—if Charles Darwin had not existed—might today be credited with the theory of evolution, with Wallacism taking the place of Darwinism.



Alfred Russel Wallace, age 24 (1847).



John Wallace, circa age 49 (1868).
Courtesy The Haggin Museum.

Then, in 1887, Alfred came to California and the two brothers not only saw each other for the first time in four decades but Alfred visited Calaveras County to write about the Big Trees.

This article marks the first account to detail Calaveras County's connection to the more widely esteemed Wallace brother, without whom the theory of evolution might never have become popularized in the late 19th century. Primary sources include the 1908 Revised Edition of Alfred's autobiography, *My Life: A Record Of Events And Opinions* (Chapman & Hall, London), contemporary newspapers, and a handful of private letters courtesy of the collection of the Natural History Museum in London which are referenced here for the first time anywhere.

John was born in 1819, the sixth of nine children, in St. George's, Southwark, England. Alfred, the youngest, was born in 1823 in Usk, Monmouthshire. The middle-class family of modest means (their father, Thomas Vere Wallace, was an occasional teacher and librarian) later moved to Hertford. It was there, when Alfred is seven, that our story nearly ends before it begins. The brothers and several schoolmates were about to bathe in the River Beane when Alfred was unex-

pectedly pushed into the water. Unable to swim, he sank under the surface and swallowed water. John jumped in and pulled him out. "If my brother had not been there," Alfred wrote in his autobiography, "it is quite possible that I might have been drowned." If not for John Wallace, the history of the theory of evolution would have lacked one of its major players.

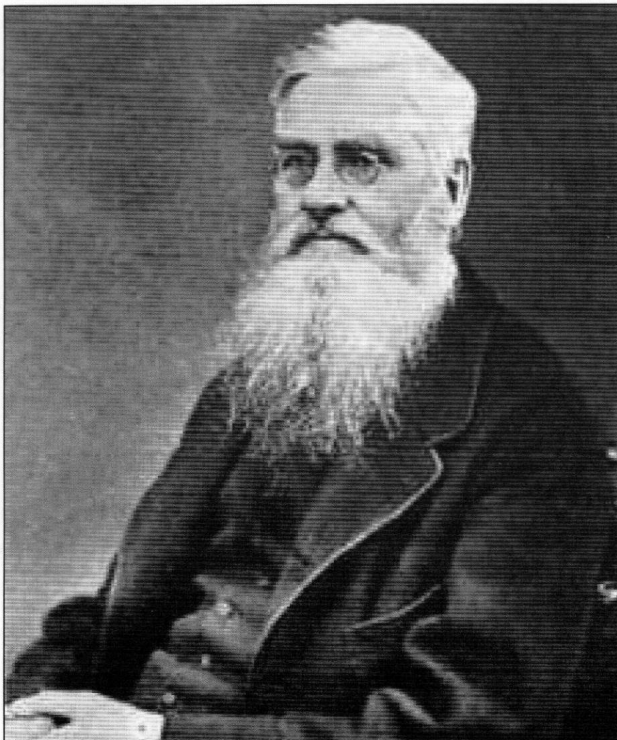
John was important to Alfred as older brother, mentor and role model ("my chief playmate and instructor," as Alfred put it). Both young men would grow tall, about six feet, and lean. But they differed in personality and interests. Alfred noted that "John was of a more mechanical turn than myself." John would build toys and Alfred would admire his skill and assist him. As a teenager, John was apprenticed to a London builder and became an accomplished carpenter while also learning surveying. When Alfred was 14, he joined John in London. There, the brothers would nightly frequent a workingmen's club where books and lectures on philosophy provided the entertainment alongside games such as dominoes. At that venue, Alfred heard utopian thinker Robert Owen and became a convert to socialism. Brother John, however, would later find a different influence—America.

Alfred soon moved in with his eldest brother, William, also a surveyor, and began to learn what had become the family trade. When he reached age 21, he once more shared lodgings with John in London but was on his own looking for employment. William's 1846 death in Neath in South Wales provided both funds and unfinished surveying work to complete. Alfred then convinced John to give up his carpentry and join him in Neath to start a building-surveying-architecture business. During the summers for two years, they would also explore the countryside, with Alfred collecting butterflies and insects along with insights on the science of biology. In 1848, the wider world called and Alfred sailed for the Amazon, intent upon learning more about the processes of nature. He would spend the next four years in the South American rainforest.

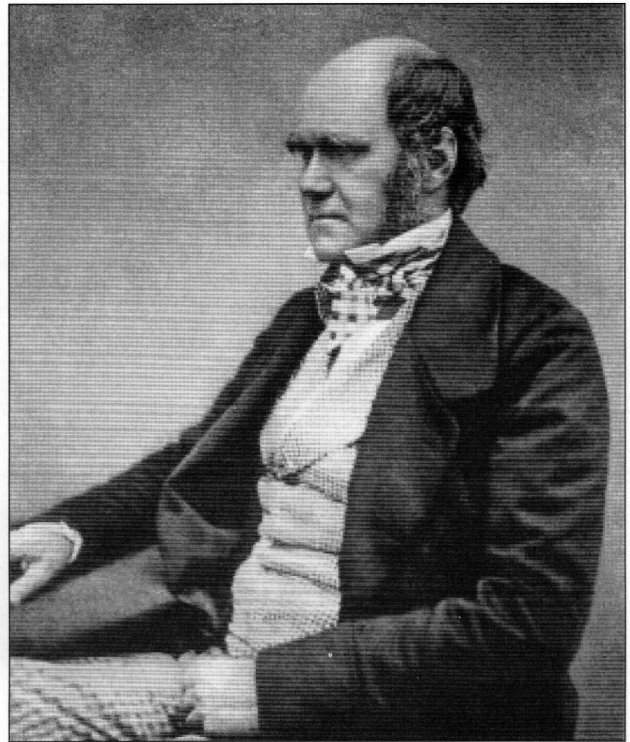
John, meanwhile, bought a small dairy farm but the enterprise failed. In 1849, he joined the frenzied hordes rushing to California in search of gold. A voyage around the Horn on the *Pera* lasted

eight months and he landed in San Francisco on December 12, 1849. After a short stay in Marin County, he traveled to Stockton and then walked to Sonora. He mined there awhile but, as with most miners of the day, was not successful. "There is of course a possibility that I might have done better," he wrote in a subsequent letter to his mother, "but there is more probability that I should have done worse...the few mining speculations that I have been engaged in have all turned out failures or nearly so." In July 1851 he found a more suitable occupation, as engineer for the Tuolumne (or Columbia) Water Co. He remained with that company for 12 years, rising from engineer to superintendent to president.

John quickly adapted to California life and found it fascinating. In his 1854 letter to his mother, he comments on how "rare and dear" tomatoes are in England but how wonderful they are in America: "When I first tasted them here I thought I should never be able to eat them but I now like them any way, either off the bush or sliced up with vinegar or stewed into a kind of sauce or stewed up with sugar. They are first rate." He also speaks of the poisonous tarantulas and gives a detailed description of the blue-tailed fly that eats spiders. Clearly, powers of obser-



Alfred Russel Wallace, age 55 (1878).



Charles Darwin, age 45 (1854).

vation and an interest in nature were a Wallace family trait.

In late 1854, John visited England. Alfred though was not there. He had shipped off to explore Malaysia, Borneo, New Guinea and Indonesia on another scientific expedition, one that would last eight years. (Alfred's books about his adventures would be considered among the century's best scientific travel books). When John returned to California the following year, he arrived with his new bride, Mary Elizabeth Webster.

In 1855 Alfred published an essay entitled "On The Law Which Has Regulated The Introduction Of New Species," which essentially laid out the theory of evolution. Another prominent naturalist of the time, Charles Lyell, even brought it to the attention of Darwin. Three years later, Alfred penned an essay entitled "On The Tendency Of Varieties To Depart Indefinitely From The Original Type," developing the idea of the survival of the fittest, and sent it to Darwin directly.

Alfred always acknowledged Darwin's genius and that Darwin had formed the theory of evolution before Alfred; Darwin had simply not published a major work that coalesced his thoughts. Darwin, in turn, did not want it to seem that he had pilfered Alfred's ideas. He wrote in a letter to Lyell, quoted

by Alfred in his autobiography, that “I would far rather burn my whole book, than that he (Wallace) or any other man should think that I had behaved in a paltry spirit.”

Satisfied simply with the knowledge that he had been on the same wavelength as Darwin, Alfred graciously took a backseat and a potentially nasty dispute over evolution’s creation never seriously materialized when in late 1859 Darwin published his epochal *On The Origin Of Species*. Alfred justly took credit that the publication of his own work had spurred Darwin to write his landmark book.

In an 1863 letter to John, Alfred inquired if his brother had read Darwin’s book and offered to send him a copy if he had not. He proudly added, “I have some little share in the work myself having discovered the same principle on which the work depends, called by Mr. D. ‘Natural Selection,’ and communicated it to him before the work was published.”

Alfred and Darwin became friends and colleagues, whether differing in their opinions or deferring to each other’s expertise. In 1870, Darwin wrote him (quoted in Alfred’s autobiography): “I hope it is a satisfaction to you to reflect—and very few things in my life have been more satisfactory to me—that we have never felt any jealousy towards each other, though in some sense rivals.” When Darwin died in 1882, Alfred was one of his 10 illustrious pallbearers at the Westminster Abbey funeral. For the next 30 years, Alfred Russel Wallace would be the most prominent living champion of Darwin and Darwinism.

As for brother John, he moved to Stockton in 1865 and in 1868 won the elected post of County Surveyor, a position he held for eight years. While Alfred became a well-known socialist, John was a staunch Republican. In an 1893 letter, he wrote Alfred, “I suppose you have heard of the general stagnation of business all over the United States, owing to the Democratic administration.” John was a firm believer in capitalism and the optimistic, free enterprise spirit of America. The divergence in the brothers’ views is evident comparing Alfred’s treatises on what he viewed as the deplorable state of the workingman and a four-page 1892 manuscript Alfred asked John to write on the state of skilled building workers 50 years earlier. As

far as John was concerned, the workers of that day had been fairly paid, were compensated for working overtime and surely were able to support their families unless they “lost time through their drunkenness and violence.” He went on to propose that “aggitators (sic) were frequently trying to prove that the lot of the workers were very hard and ought to be ameliorated, but they always failed to point out any feasible method.” In fact, his brother Alfred had become one of those same agitators. He never utilized John’s manuscript. If the political and social philosophies of the two brothers had ever been similar, they surely had by now grown far apart.

In the early 1880s, John became chief engineer/surveyor of the newly formed San Joaquin & Sierra Nevada Railroad. He laid out the line the narrow gauge would take. When the S.J. & S.N.R.R. arrived just across the Calaveras County border in October 1882 on its way east from Lodi, the railroad honored Wallace by naming the town it created after him. But John never owned property in or lived in Wallace.

Unfortunately, the reference volume *California Place Names* (Erwin G. Gudde, University of California Press, 1969) has the issue of the naming of Wallace completely wrong: “The place was named for an unidentified man by David S. Burson, the founder of the town.” Of course, Burson (Daniel not David) would found Burson in 1884 and had nothing whatsoever to do with the founding of Wallace.

The townsite was officially recorded on January 16, 1883, having been surveyed by the newest surveyor in the Wallace Family, John’s oldest son, John Herbert. Because J.H. Wallace’s name appears on the townsite document, previous local historians assumed that the younger Wallace was therefore the town’s namesake. But recent, more thorough research by this author reveals that the town was not named after J.H. Wallace as has been claimed for several decades. The *Lodi Sentinel* confirms that the railroad intended to honor the father, not the son: “Wallace ex-county surveyor of this county is engineer” (March 4, 1882) and “a station will be located and the nucleus formed of a town to be named Wallace in honor of Mr. Wallace, the engineer whose efficient work as surveyor for the company merits this signal honor” (June 24, 1882).

In addition, an article in the Lodi Review reprinted in the *Calaveras Weekly Citizen* (December 16, 1882) stated that the railroad company “gave it (the town) the name of their trusty and faithful civil engineer, Wallace.” John Herbert—who was one of the first graduates of Weber (later Stockton) High School in 1871—was only 26 years old at the time of Wallace’s founding. While he was no doubt “trusty” (he had already gained valuable experience as a civil engineer working in Folsom in 1880), the young man only recently hired could hardly be credited as “faithful.” His employment as surveyor of the town appears to be nepotism courtesy of his father, the long-respected chief engineer for the railroad.

Then, in 1885, Alfred was invited to present a series of lectures beginning late the following year in America. Since he would be on the continent, he decided to reunite with his brother, whom he had not seen in nearly 40 years. Wrote the *Stockton Daily Independent* on May 20, 1887: “Dr. Alfred R. Wallace, the celebrated English scientist, will arrive in this State...and will visit his brother, John Wallace, civil engineer, of this city.”

After giving speeches in the east—from the Lowell Institute to Johns Hopkins University—Alfred traveled cross-country by train and the long-awaited reunion with John took place in San Francisco. There Alfred lectured twice, with the *San Francisco Bulletin* (quoted in the May 20, 1887 *Stockton Daily Independent*) calling him “the most eminent living naturalist in the world... (who) arrived at the conclusion of the evolution theory, the origin of species and the doctrine of natural selection independently of Darwin.”

In Stockton, Alfred stayed with John and his family—wife Mary, sons John Herbert, William, Alfred, Percy and Arthur, and daughter Mary. He gave two lectures in early June, one on evolution and one on the origin of islands, both at the Avon

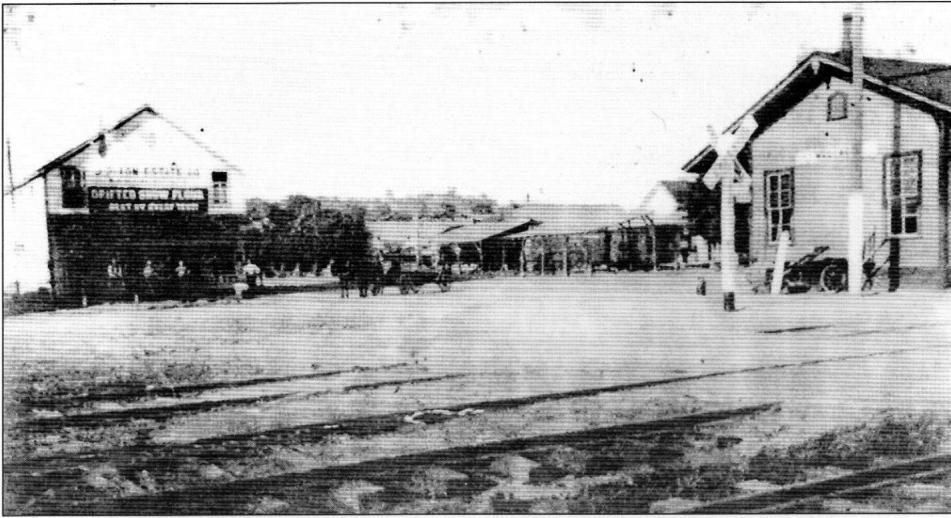


Avon Theatre, Stockton, 1896. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, *Historic American Buildings Survey*.

Theater. The reviewer of the evolution speech for the *Stockton Daily Independent* (June 2, 1887) enthused: “The speaker was warmly applauded by his appreciative listeners, whose close attention he had held during his remarks. His delivery was not marked by eloquence, but was plain and straightforward, without any unnecessary flourish, and was befitting his subject.”

While in Stockton, Alfred also joined John and niece Mary on a sojourn of a few days to Yosemite (two hours by rail to Milton then two days by stage). On their way back to Stockton, they took an excursion to the Calaveras Grove of Big Trees. They stayed three days and Alfred was unabashed in his autobiography in praise of the Sequoia: “Of all the natural wonders I saw in America, nothing impressed me so much as these glorious trees.” It appears, however, that during his visit to Calaveras County Alfred never visited the town named after his brother.

Though he marveled at the scenic wonders in America, Alfred was not enamored with America as a society. He was a vegetarian, believed in community ownership of all land, women’s suffrage and a minimum wage—all radical ideas at the time—and was what today we would call an environmentalist. In an 1891 essay in the *Fortnightly*



Wallace, circa 1900. *Courtesy Calaveras County Historical Society.*

Review, he decried the American zeal for cutting down forests and railed against “defacing our land and destroying its natural beauty.” Reflecting on the grandeur of the Big Trees, he warned that it is “within the power of man totally to destroy (them), as they have been already partially destroyed. Let us hope that the progress of true education will so develop (sic) the love and admiration of nature, that the possession of these altogether unequalled trees will be looked upon as a trust for all future generations, and that care will be taken, before it is too late, to preserve not only one or two

small patches, but some more extensive tracts of forest, in which they may continue to flourish, in their fullest perfection and beauty, for thousands of years to come.”

In 19th century America, his views on that subject were far more radical than his belief in mesmerism and spiritualism. That belief has damaged Alfred’s legacy of rational scientific inquiry in the years since.

Yet, at the time, science and spirit had not been separated by church or state. Alfred’s exploration of the otherworldly was, in fact, considered scientific. He even pursued it while in San Francisco, where he and John attended a séance conducted by a medium named Fred Evans. When a message mysteriously appeared on a slate board and was signed “Your father, T.V. Wallace,” Alfred was wholly convinced he was communicating with the spirits of departed relatives. What was the reaction of John, a steadfast member of the Episcopal Church, is unknown.

THE SURVEYOR OF WALLACE MAKES A NAME FOR HIMSELF

The accomplishments of John Wallace’s eldest son, John Herbert, require their own explanation. In the late 1880s, after having surveyed the town of Wallace, John Herbert moved to San Francisco and became Assistant Superintendent of the Track Department for the Southern Pacific Co. In the first decade of the new century he co-designed the Southern Pacific’s Berkeley Station and perhaps others. He was also a proponent of intra-city electric railways and a 1910 prospectus for the Tidewater & Southern Railway, an electric railway proposed for Stockton, boasts of having J.H. as its Chief Engineer.

He later became an engineer for the Federal Telegraph Co., which had been established

in Palo Alto in 1912 and was the seed from which Silicon Valley would sprout. Federal Telegraph luminaries included scientists such as Lee DeForest (whose vacuum tube made possible radio, radar, television and, ultimately, computers) and Charles Litton (who created the pioneering technology company Litton Industries).

In the 1920s, Federal Telegraph was contracted to erect and operate one radio station for trans-Pacific communication between America to China and four others within China. The man they sent to lead the effort, at the age of 70, was John Herbert Wallace.

In August 1887, Alfred returned to England. The brothers never saw each other again.

For the remainder of Alfred's life, thanks to constant publishing of his work on subjects from economics to language to the possibility of life on other planets, Alfred Russel Wallace was one of the world's most recognized names. He was a man who never attended university but received an honorary doctorate from Oxford. He was the bane of the establishment but accepted the Order of Merit from the Crown. Two years after he died at age 90 on November 7, 1913, a medallion bearing his name was placed in Westminster Abbey. Today, along with his contributions to the theory of evolution, social economics and political philosophy, he is considered the father of zoogeography and his 1869 volume *The Malay Archipelago* is still the most famous work ever written on that subject.

John Wallace died many years earlier, at age 76 on March 26, 1895. He is buried in the family plot at the Stockton Rural Cemetery. The small town of Wallace in western Calaveras County is believed to be the only place on the globe named after either Wallace brother.

For further reading about Alfred Russel Wallace, several books have been published just since 2000, including: Infinite Tropics: An Alfred Russel Wallace Anthology; Alfred Russel Wallace: A Life; The Heretic In Darwin's Court: The Life Of Alfred Russel Wallace; In Darwin's Shadow: The Life And Science Of Alfred Russel Wallace; An Elusive Victorian: The Evolution Of Alfred Russel Wallace;



Wallace Gravesite, Stockton Rural Cemetery, 2005.
Photo Courtesy Sal Manna.

The Forgotten Naturalist: In Search Of Alfred Russel Wallace; and Naturalist In The River: The Life And Early Writings of Alfred Russel Wallace.

Sal Manna is a freelance writer who has written for newspapers such as the Los Angeles Times and magazines including Time and Playboy. His local area of interest is the history of western Calaveras County, particularly Burson, Wallace and Valley Springs.

Editor's note: the tarantulas in Calaveras County are not poisonous.

CEREMONY TO HONOR JOHN WALLACE

Commemoration To Be Held September 16 in Stockton

To mark for the first time their contributions to the town of Wallace by John Wallace and the Wallace Family, a special ceremony will be held at the Wallace family plot at the Stockton Rural Cemetery at 11 a.m. on Saturday, September 16, 2006. Expected to be in attendance are direct

descendants of John Wallace as well as representatives of various local historical societies. For more information on the commemoration sponsored by the Society for the Preservation of West Calaveras History, please contact Sal Manna at (209) 772-0336.

Calaveras County Historical Society

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The Calaveras County Historical Society is a non-profit corporation. It meets on the fourth Thursday of each month in various communities throughout the County. Locations and scheduled programs are announced in advance. Some meetings include a dinner program, and visitors are always welcome.

The Society operates the Calaveras County Museum which is open daily from 10:00 to 4:00 in the historic County courthouse located at 30 Main Street in San Andreas.

The Society's office is located in historic San Andreas, the Calaveras County seat. Visitors are always welcome to stop by the office for assistance with research, and are encouraged to visit the museum while in the area. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:00, and the telephone number is (209) 754-1058, or contact us at: CCHS@goldrush.com.

New Members

The Historical Society welcomes the following new members:

May 2006

Norah & Michael Falvey, Mountain Ranch
James & Deana Murchison, Mountain Ranch
Dana & Gwen Nichols, Mountain Ranch
Wallace-Burson Assoc., Wallace
Leanne Bryan, Mountain Ranch
Guy & Sally Morrill, Pahrump, NV
Dawn & Mike Mensinger, Riverbank
Denise Dashiell, Mountain Ranch
Calvin & Thanh-Nguyet Mehlert, Camp Connell
Randy & Sue Metzger, San Andreas
Jay & Clayre Quick, Angels Camp
Judith Whited, San Andreas

Donations

The Historical Society is grateful for the following donations:

March 2006

The Skull 1921 Calaveras High School Yearbook and 1925 Commencement Exercise Program—Kay Frances Drag Bolt Hubbard, Coronado

Photographs and deeds—Patricia Hungerford, Murphys

Two photos, mining materials and three books—Willard P. Fuller, Jr., San Andreas

April 2006

Calaveras County Cemetery Records—Foothill Resources, Mokelumne Hill

May 2006

Book: *The First Book of the California Gold Rush*—Kathy Cochran, San Andreas