



CALAVERAS COUNTY SHERIFFS 1903 TO 1954

by Charity Maness

The July 2016 issue of *Las Calaveras* began recounting the history of the Calaveras County Sheriffs who served from 1850 until 1902. This issue continues looking at the men who held the position of Calaveras County Sheriff from 1903 until 1954.

George Christian Graves elected 1902 Served 1903–1906

George Graves succeeded Sheriff Ben Thorn, who along with other lawmen was credited with the capture of the infamous stage-coach robber, Black Bart.

According to a news item in the *Calaveras Prospect* January 3, 1903:

“In the Sheriff’s Office George C. Graves, will succeed Sheriff Thorn, who with the exception of two years term has filled the office so long that the memory of the present generation runs not to the contrary.”

Filling Ben Thorn’s boots was going to be a challenge, a challenge supported by an article in the *San Francisco Call* after Thorn’s death which stated, *“In the days when laws were loose, when the bandit, the*

stage robber, and the horse thief abounded, when life was cheap and men lived in the frontier stages of existence, Thorn’s name was terror to the criminal.”



Photo courtesy Calaveras County Historical Society

Thorn served as Sheriff from 1867 to 1875 when he chose not to run for re-election; instead he took up work as a lawman for Wells Fargo. Benjamin Hawes was then elected and held the position with little notoriety until 1877 at which time Thorn ran again for the position and held it until 1902 at which time Graves was elected.

George Graves' election to Sheriff was not his first foray into law enforcement. Graves became a constable of Jenny Lind Township in 1885 and served in that capacity until 1887 at which time he became a Deputy Sheriff serving the county in that position until 1892. From 1892 to 1895 he served as undersheriff to Ben Thorn with the title of jailer added in 1895. He held both positions until 1902 when he was elected Sheriff.

Soon after Graves took office, he was tasked with forming an official posse to hunt down the killer of James Casey, Deputy Constable for the San Andreas Township.

On July 26, 1903 a local laborer, Jules Martinez, had had one too many drinks in Frank Barton's saloon in San Andreas when he began to harass others at the saloon. Deputy Sheriff James Casey was also in the saloon and issued Martinez verbal warnings regarding his behavior. When those warnings had no effect, Casey took Martinez into custody and placed him in the drunk tank, known as "the hole". After placing Martinez in the cell, Casey realized he had failed to search the prisoner; a mistake with lethal consequences. Casey returned to search Martinez and was fatally wounded by a pistol in Martinez's possession.

Deputy Sheriff A. G. Thorn was duty jailer that fateful afternoon. After hearing what he believed to be shots fired from the jail yard, he ran toward the area only to be confronted with Martinez leveling a pistol at him. Thorn was able to disarm the prisoner but Martinez managed to break free and made a getaway.

While the town folk formed a renegade posse Sheriff Graves formed an official one.

Martinez was found by Graves' posse, led by Deputy D. A. Charles Snyder, and delivered to the jail. At trial Martinez was found guilty of the murder of Casey and sentenced to "be delivered to the Warden of San Quentin and hanged by the neck until dead".

George Graves was active in the Freemasons and held the position of Master of the Calaveras Masonic Lodge #78, founded in 1855, from 1897 to 1898. As a past master he held the position of Junior Warden in 1898 with saloon keeper William Casey holding the position of Senior Warden.

Joshua Jones elected 1906 Served 1907–1914

Joshua Jones, Jr. was one of ten children born to Joshua Jones Sr. and wife, Catherine Parks, who emigrated west before the Civil War. Joshua Jr. became a teamster with his older brother, Bill, hauling freight into the mountains and transporting logs back down to the sawmill at Angels.

Jones later married and his wife, Sarah Land, had three daughters; Leonora, Emma and Henrietta.

Elected to office in 1906, not much is recorded about his stint in office. Sheriff Jones was said to have a Great Dane/Russian blood hound mix dog at the jail to "scare a prisoner out of all desire to escape." When his little niece Pearl—daughter of brother Ben Sr. and wife Mamie Bryant—would visit, he would let her ride on the large dog's back as if it was a small pony.

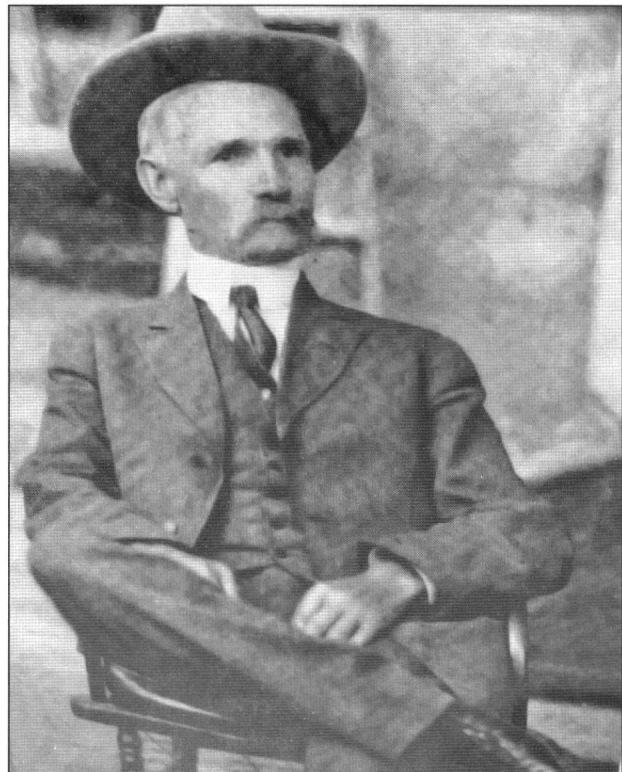


Photo courtesy Calaveras County Historical Society

According to the State Board of Charities and Corrections, which oversaw prison conditions, during the first two years of Jones term as Sheriff the jail averaged 32 inmates per year. The jail was deemed by the inspectors as “insecure and unsafe. It is also dark and unsanitary... no water supply, no toilet, no plumbing... blankets reported washed once per year...”

In 1913 at the 40th session of the Legislature of the State of California an appendix to the journals of the Senate and Assembly was recorded for the years 1910–1912. In that appendix it was reported that little to no changes had been made to the conditions at the jail, built in 1867, under Jones supervision, with a recommendation that a new jail was needed within the county stating, “*The present jail is not only unsafe, but unhealthy and unsanitary and has no redeeming features and should be condemned.*”*

**The jail continued to operate until 1964, and is part of the Calaveras County Museum displays.*

John Cosgrave elected 1914 Served 1915–1922

John Cosgrave was elected Constable of the Angels Township in 1902 and served in that capacity for three full terms, leaving that office to run for the office of Sheriff. Cosgrave hit the ground running with no shortage of a variety of crimes with which to investigate.

Cosgrave developed a reputation for eliciting confessions and catching the bad guys.

In mid-June 1915, Cosgrave was called to action when a felony complaint of desertion was issued against Reverend William A. Watts, a South Methodist Pastor, postmaster and storekeeper in Milton. Watts had apparently abandoned his posts and eloped with the school teacher, Miss Genevieve Bunds.

In early May 1916, Cosgrave solved a murder via confession of a killer and subsequent finding of the murder weapon, a two and half foot-long pipe, at the bottom of a well. The woman confessed to planning the crime and assisting one Jack Silva in the murder of her husband, George, a Melones mine teamster, by “*beating out her husband’s brains*” in her bedroom where one of the couple’s five children lay sleeping. Later the eldest child, a boy of 13, told Cosgrave about his

mother and him taking meals to Silva in a tent hideout up on the hill of the property for a few days prior to the murder.

Within days he was once again trying to solve a murder, this time of an 8-month-old child and his grandmother, as well as the attempted murder of the child’s young 17-year-old mother. Jack Treanor, a Fosteria miner, came home a bit tipsy one night and suffered a tongue lashing from his mother-in-law. Not too keen on this treatment Treanor decided to take matters into his own hands. He shot his mother-in-law, his child and slashed the throat of his wife, leaving her for dead.

Sheriff Cosgrave and Constable Cliff Nuner trailed the suspect to the top of Golden Gate Mountain near Valley Springs where Treanor took his own life. He had left a note to his partner Joe Whitman advising him to avoid his mother-in-law claiming that she was the cause and to blame for his actions.

Joseph William Zwinge elected 1922 Served 1923–1950

Calaveras Weekly Prospect, January 13, 1923

“A bloodless revolution occurred in Calaveras last Monday and scarcely caused a ripple in the

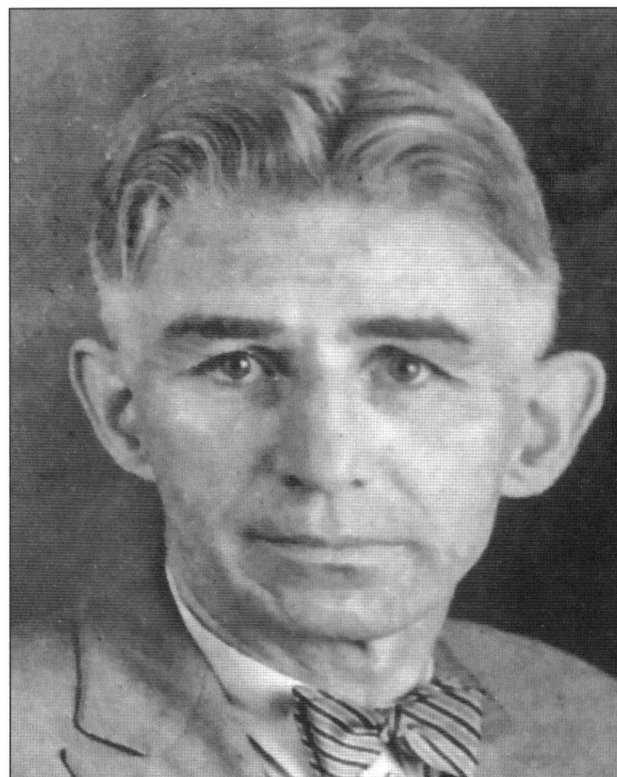


Photo courtesy Calaveras County Historical Society

surface of the community. The center of the affair was the county court house. John Cosgrave and George Graves were ousted from the Sheriff's Office, where for eight years they had resided as a terror to evil doers, and Joe Zwinge and Joe Serra marched in."

Joseph William Zwinge was born March 29, 1881 to William Zwinge and Harriet Eltringham, the first of seven children born of this union. His younger brother Melvin, born March 6, 1892, proved that lawmen ran in the family blood lines as he had held the office of Jenny Lind Constable from 1938 to 1950.

During Sheriff Joe Zwinge's tenure, times began to change drastically and law enforcement had to mature and adapt. While mining was still prevalent, crimes were being committed on larger scales and lawlessness began taking on a different form.

With prohibition in full swing when Sheriff Zwinge took office, there existed a County ordinance No. 129—illegal possession of intoxicating liquors. This was a major issue faced by Zwinge during his early tenure with raids and search warrants being served the relative norm. Zwinge became known as the kind of Sheriff that would not turn a blind eye to bootleggers, prostitution or gambling. For example, in Melones in 1923, five residents were arrested in a liquor raid carried out by Sheriff Joe Zwinge, assisted by Constable J. T. Morley of Murphys and Constable Jerome O'Connor of Angels Camp, and Deputy Sheriff Philip Ortez of Melones. They confiscated "hundreds of gallons of wine, genuine beer, jackass brandy, real champagne, and absinthe", along with a twenty gallon still. "Curious crowds have been visiting the city hall since the raid to look over the stock of wet goods taken in."



Photo courtesy Calaveras County Historical Society

On August 16, 1929, Zwinge assisted law enforcement agencies from across the country in bringing in a wanted fugitive from Colorado. Herbert L Royston was a member of a gang that held up the First National Bank of Lamar in Colorado on May 23, 1928, shooting and killing three of the bank officials and a doctor and making off with \$100,000.00. Royston was tracked down and found working as the night engineer at the Calaveras Cement Plant in San Andreas and was arrested at his home there.

A few years later Zwinge was handsomely rewarded for his efforts in the capture of Royston.

According to the *Calaveras Prospect* January 30, 1932, Sheriff Joe Zwinge “will receive \$1,625.00 as his share of the posted reward for the capture of Howard L. Royston and for furnishing information leading to the capture of the balance of the notorious Fleagle gang, who held up the Lamar Colorado bank and killed four persons.”

In August of 1930, Zwinge formed a posse with Tuolumne county Sheriff Dambacher in search of wanted fugitive and murderer Joseph Balado who was accused of murdering his wife. Balado admitted to the slaying, stating, “she was the meanest women I ever knew” while going on to claim she was trying to steal his money.

Joe Zwinge’s reign as Sheriff was not without multiple jail escape attempts. In February 1931, a young prisoner being held within the county jail under Zwinge’s watchful eye had no wish to remain there and made his plan to escape.

At 16 years old and with only one day in jail under his belt, young Grover Fischer tore up his bed and used the springs to reach the window of his cell. He pried off the bars and escaped over the jail yard fence. However, seeing as how he fancied himself a poet in his own right, before he made his daring escape he penned a poem for Sheriff Zwinge.

*“On February fourth I was thrown into jail,
and now I’m escaping to hit the Lone Trail.*

*They thought they could hold me in this stuffy hole,
in plain words they judged me to be a plain fool.*

*But I was not destined to stay long in jail,
far better to me is the outlaw trail.*

*I paced around the cell (just six feet by eight),
and gloomily thought of my future’s sad fate.*

*I looked at the window all strengthened by bars,
and through them were twinkling the heavenly stars.*

*I climbed to it’s height; for a minutes short length,
I grasped a good hold and exerted my strength.*

*The bars were all bended, and needless to say,
I will soon leave here and hasten away.*

*So I’ll take the lone trail and be an outlaw,
I’ll make a damn good one as some of you saw.*

*I’m sorry to do this, I’m sorry to say,
that without your permission I’m going away.*

*But it cannot be helped, so you officers three,
had best stir around and just try to find me.*

*Now I’m not a poet and don’t care to be,
but wait yet a minute and listen to me.*

*And I’ll try to explain in this confounded rhyme,
the thoughts that I’ve held in check up to this time.*

*To Mr. Airola I’m grateful, also,
to Mr. Joe Zwinge, the sheriff you know,*

*And also H. Collins, the good deputy,
I’d like to thank all for your kindness to me,*

*But of reform school I can’t bear the thought,
and to stay in a jail house I’ve never been taught*

*I’d rather be out “on the dodge” they say,
than to be cooped in a damn cell all day.*

*I guess I will have to be signing off now,
I’m sorry to raise such a hell of a row.*

*Well, you may catch me, and then you may fail,
but at least for a while I will be free of jail.*

*And now I must crawl out and hit the old trail,
so this is the end of my sorrowful tale.*

Grover

*P.S. Now let me remind you for our friendship’s sake,
that prison walls do not a prisoner make.”*

In another daring escape, on May 10, 1939 two inmates, Wallace Rodgers, 23, and Burnett McFarland, 21, escaped and chose to use Sheriff Zwinge’s own official car as their getaway vehicle.

In May of 1936 the office of Sheriff took on yet another role.

Sheriff Joseph Zwinge's position as an elected official took on a new look as he was now the voice and the face of the Sheriff's Office, a politician so to speak, and was the principle speaker May 9th on KLX radio promoting the Calaveras County Eighth Annual Jumping Frog Jubilee.

In a rather humorous account during his career, on October 18, 1937, in an embarrassing case of mistaken identity, Zwinge picked up what he believed to be a 'vag' or a vagabond. He was a black-bearded, rough-looking stranger, and it was relatively well known that Zwinge preferred to keep his county free of less than desirable folks. The man was picked up while looking under the hood of an expensive vehicle. The man identified himself as Frank "Lefty" O'Doul, manager of the San Francisco Seals' baseball club, but Zwinge was not willing to take his word for it and took him from Angels Camp to San Andreas, the county seat, where the Seals' pilot finally proved his identity.

When election time came around in 1950, Zwinge declined re-election due to ill health. He passed away April 27, 1956, just six short years after leaving the office of Sheriff of Calaveras County; an office he held for almost three decades.

Harry James elected 1950 Served 1951–1954

Harry James was born March 2, 1889 in Grass Valley. He was drafted during World War I and worked as a machinist during World War II. After the wars, he spent some time mining in Nevada, selling mining equipment and running his own company before throwing his hat in the ring for Sheriff.

James had thrown his hat in the ring to run for Sheriff in 1938 with little success.

The *Californian* June 30, 1938 story read: "*Harry E. James, Mokelumne Hill mining machinery dealer, last Saturday filed nomination papers in the office of county clerk John Squellati for county sheriff, subject to primary election in August.*"

"James, native of California, and son of pioneer parents of the Mother Lode, has been in the mining machinery business since 1914 and

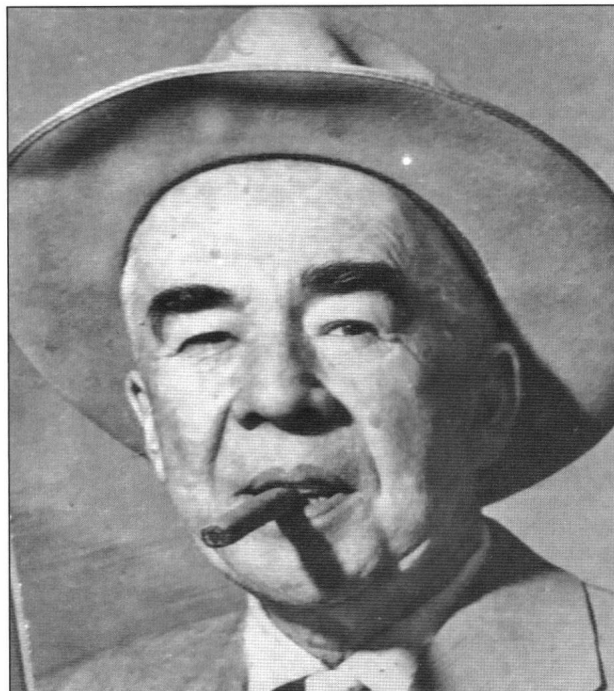


Photo courtesy Calaveras County Historical Society

for the past five years has been a resident of Mokelumne Hill. His parents operated a hotel in Copperopolis in the early days. He was born in Grass Valley."

Harry James competed again for the seat in 1950 against multiple hopefuls: Deputies George Wadsworth and Arthur Rundle of San Andreas; James H. Ish, Constable Jenny Lind township; Lester McFall, constable San Andreas township; Ted Mossman, West Point transportation operator; Fred Stanley Day, Angels Camp logging operator; Charles J. Stone, Angels Camp garage owner and a resident of Copperopolis; Clarence Monte Verda, Angels Camp laborer; Herbert J. Caton of Angels Camp. This time, his bid was successful, and he was named as Calaveras County Sheriff.

During his tenure, thieves with outdated information invaded the White Wall Ranch in Angels Camp in July 1953, making off with only \$27.00 in cash. The youthful thieves had robbed a notorious house of prostitution hoping to make some money, yet were unaware that the house had been raided by James and his men in April of that year and was no longer in operation. All four were caught and charged with armed robbery.

James was known to take a hardline stance against gambling as evidenced by the 1951 picture of him and his deputies displaying confiscated slot machines.



Photo courtesy Calaveras County Historical Society

Sometimes Sheriffs didn't just hunt for criminals. In August 1952 Sanford Hass, 29, of Stockton and his 11-year-old son David had headed to Lake Alpine for an overnight camping trip. When they failed to return home, James formed a mounted posse of sheriff deputies and local Boy Scouts to comb the rugged wilderness. Four days after heading out for the overnight camping trip the duo was located near Big Trees Grove, with blistered feet, but alive and well.

In another case, while out for a drive in June 1954, James picked up a young hitch hiker by the name of Jack J. Reynolds. While driving along, James heard the description of Reynolds over the radio. Apparently, Reynolds had just escaped from the California Youth Authority in Pine Grove. Fortunately for Sheriff James, and unfortunately for Jack Reynolds, he found himself heading right back to where he came from; the California Youth Authority.

James was unseated in the 1954 election.

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San Francisco Examiner, May, 6, 1916; May 22, 1917;
August 1, 1952; July 24, 1953
Oakland Tribune, November 4, 1954

Correction to Las Calaveras Stories in Stone Part III, January 2019:

Page 3, Keystone Lodge plaque should read
"Keystone Lodge No. 161, F. & A. M., instituted in
Copperopolis Dec. 19, 1862..."

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; and the historic Red Barn Museum at 891 Mountain Ranch Road, also in San Andreas, which is open Thursday to Sunday, 10:00 to 4:00.

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 museums 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; Red Barn Museum (209) 754-0800.

January–March 2019

New Members:

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Dianne Sandoval—San Andreas
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Carol Schmollinger—Altaville
Kimberly Trent & Derek Oliver—Murphys

Donations:

Mastadon tooth—Phil Alberts
Early San Andreas townsite maps—Ken Snyder
Kathryn Robie—Cash donation
Howard Little—Mining photos, maps
Mike Cilenti—"Guest of the Fallen Sun"
by Hans Whitney, former West Point resident