



Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society
April, 1997

Volume XLV

Number 3

FORWARD

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July 26, 1875.

San Francisco

BEN THORN... TOOLS OF HIS TRADE ... see page 30

Calaveras County Historical Society

30 Main Street • P.O. Box 721
San Andreas, California 95249

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The Calaveras County historical Society, a non-profit corporation, meets on the fourth Thursday of each month in various communities throughout the county, locations of which are announced in advance. Dinner meetings also are announced in advance.

The Society's office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 4 pm. The telephone number is (209) 754-1058. Visitors are welcome. The Society also operates the Calaveras County Museum which is open daily from 10 am to 4 pm in the historic county courthouse at 30 Main St., San Andreas.

MUSEUM DONATIONS

The Calaveras County Historical Society wishes to thank the following persons who recently made donations to the Calaveras County Museum.

Coco Shearer, of San Andreas: Postcards of Calaveras County.

William J. Lang, Stockton, CA: Photo slides of the old mining town of Camanche before it was inundated by Camanche Reservoir.

Meridian Gold Inc., of Hodson: Photographs of the Royal King Gold Mine.

Bonnie Danielson, of San Andreas: An 1880's women's dress.

R.C. Borders, of Danville, CA: Blacksmith's vice from Coffey Ranch, in Burson.

Dr. Durlynn Anema Garton, of Valley Springs: Cash donation.

IN MEMORIAM

Jane Alice Huberty, of San Andreas, February 1, 1997

MEETING SCHEDULE

The April meeting of the Calaveras County Historical Society will be held at 7 p.m. on the 24th of this month at Sierra Ridge (old Fricot Ranch School). This will be a dinner meeting at which officials of Sierra Ridge will explain the purpose and operation of their new school facility there.

Author Gurlynn Anema Garton will be the guest speaker at the Calaveras County Historical Society's May 22 dinner meeting in Wendell's on Highway 49, at Mokelumne Hill. Dr. Garton's talk will center around the life of Harriet Charles Adams, a Calaveras County native, whose father was superintendent of Angels Camp's famous Lightner Mine. Harriet Adams was an explorer and lecturer for National Geographic Society and was the first woman to visit "the lines" during World War I.

Details of the historical society's June meeting are to be announced.

NEW MEMBERS

The Calaveras County Historical Society welcomes the following new members:

Joel Pitto, Walnut Creek, CA.

Betty Mershon, San Andreas.

Stacey McCarty, Copperopolis.

Beryl and Jeanie Douglas, Camp Connell.

Terry and Linda Parker, Angels camp.

Sandra L. Pack, Angels Camp.

George Treat, Stockton, CA.

Marilyn Fiscus, Angels Camp.

John Bullock, Mountain Ranch.

F. Ted Laskin, Angels Camp.

Mr. and Mrs. Bret Thompson, Murphys.

Rita Harper, Murphys.

Teri Roller Muller, Littleton, Co.

COVER PHOTO

Sheriff Ben Thorn's badge, colt frontier six-shooter and handcuffs ended the careers of countless criminals, including the infamous stage robber "Black Bart," during the nearly 50 years he enforced the law in Calaveras County. (Photo by Sharon Daniels.)

BEN THORN, CALAVERAS COUNTY'S WYATT EARP

By
George Hoeper

Longer than any other lawman in the Mother Lode, Ben Thorn carried a badge in Calaveras County for 44 years. He served as constable and sheriff, collected controversial taxes--by force if necessary--and was the consummate politician.

He was either your friend or your enemy. He viewed the world in blacks and whites. There were few grays in Ben Thorn's life. He was a brave man and opinionated. And, like most who enforced the law in his day he believed crime suspects were guilty until proven innocent. By his own admission he was not above coercing a confession when he felt the suspect was guilty.

Thorn was a complex man--a good provider-- a loving husband and father. But, he also knew from whence the support came that elected him. At times he was not above overlooking a bit of law breaking if an arrest might cost him a bloc of votes.

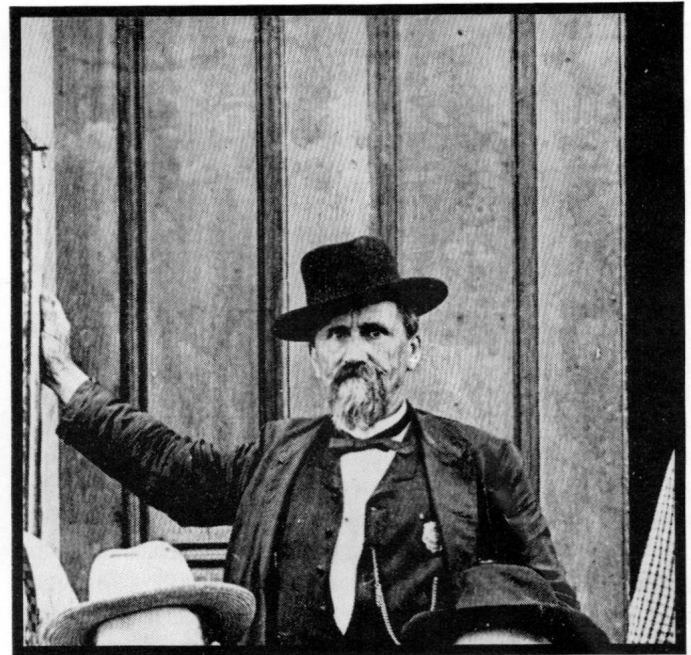
In the face of danger Ben Thorn was a fearless man. He probably brought as many criminals to justice during his career as any lawman in Northern California. An analysis of his life and character only proves that like most of us, there was both good and bad in him.

Thorn was born in Plattsbug, New York, on December 22, 1829, one of six children of Platt and Elizabeth Thorn. Oddly enough, two of the men who later would figure prominently in Thorn's life in California--Charles Boles, the notorious stage robber, Black Bart, and James Hume, Wells Fargo's chief of detectives, also were born in that same area of New York State during that same period.

The Thorn family moved to Chicago and then to Ottawa, Illinois, when Ben was a child. They farmed and lived in a log cabin so remote it had loop holes in it for defense against Indians. There, young Thorn went to school when he was not working on the farm. He apparently was industrious and an apt pupil, for while still in his teens he clerked in an Ottawa store. At age 16, in 1845, he began teaching school.¹

How long young Thorn taught school is not recorded, but he was 19, a tall, raw boned and powerful young man when word of the discovery of gold in California reached Illinois in late 1848. Hungry for adventure, he quickly fell victim of gold fever. Raised in a rural setting, his body hardened by outdoor labor, young Thorn was thoroughly familiar with firearms and was proficient with both rifle and pistol. He joined one of the first wagon trains to leave Missouri for California in April, 1849. It was not an easy trip. Spring rains hampered them and they suffered from cholera, but they traveled fast.

They arrived at Deer Creek, in Lassen County, in September. End of the month found Thorn mining on the Yuba River, upstream from Marysville, but his efforts met with no great success. He later recalled paying \$125 for a rocker with which he averaged



Calaveras Sheriff Ben Thorn, lawman for 48 years.

about eight dollars per day, which was just half of what he could have made by hiring out to a company where the going wage was \$16.

Thorn abandoned the Yuba River, purchased supplies in Sacramento and headed for Volcano, in Amador County. There he mined in Indian Gulch until February, then moved to Mokelumne Hill. Finding that area too crowded, he mined for a short time at Rich Gulch, east of Mokelumne Hill, then moved to San Antone Camp on San Antonio Creek, six miles east of San Andreas.

San Antone Camp was one of the earliest of the Calaveras mining areas. Americans arrived there in the late summer or early fall of 1848 and quite probably found Hispanics from Mexico's state of Sonora already mining there.

Quickly, the canyon's rich gravels attracted a growing hoard of gold seekers. In addition to the Mexican miners and the Americans from the eastern U.S., Chileans, Italians, French, Germans, Australians, Chinese and other nationalities arrived from every corner of the world.

When young Ben Thorn arrived in the spring of 1850 San Antone was a hell-raising, rip-roaring mining camp with a population upward of a thousand miners. A conglomeration of tents and hastily built cabins housed tradesmen, countless saloons, gambling joints and fandango halls along its muddy main street and sheltered a motley gathering of miners, gamblers, female camp followers and hangers-on.

Much of the San Antone populace was comprised of Chileanos who had been among the earliest arrivals. They were generally resentful of the Americans' presence and their dislike

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had been sharpened by recent imposition of a foreign miners' tax which they felt was unjust. To demonstrate their independence they passed up no opportunity to fight. Shootings and stabbings became common. Claim jumping and disputes over water rights were a constant source of turmoil. The somewhat mythical outlaw, Joaquin Murietta about whom fanciful tales have been woven, was said to have frequented the camp's fandango halls.

Thorn acquired two mining claims which he soon began working with hired labor, and he quickly became initiated into the camp life. Young, tough and reckless, he apparently did his share of roistering and enjoyed the "go-to-hell" atmosphere of the camp. Informed that a Chileano miner, jealous over his attentions to one of the camp women, had threatened to "take care of him," Thorn who had been drinking, draped himself in an American Flag. Then, with a Colt revolver in each hand he paraded down the camp's main street, singing the Star Spangled Banner at the top of his voice. His challenger chose not to appear.

Meanwhile, as one of the camp's solid citizens, he at times served on hastily formed posses to arrest criminals and help maintain law and order.

Then, in April, 1855, Ben Thorn officially became a lawman when Sheriff Charles A. Clarke appointed him deputy sheriff.

Thorn added to his authority by being elected Constable of the San Antone Camp area in order to serve papers and legal notices for the township court, which monetarily, represented a rather lucrative sideline.

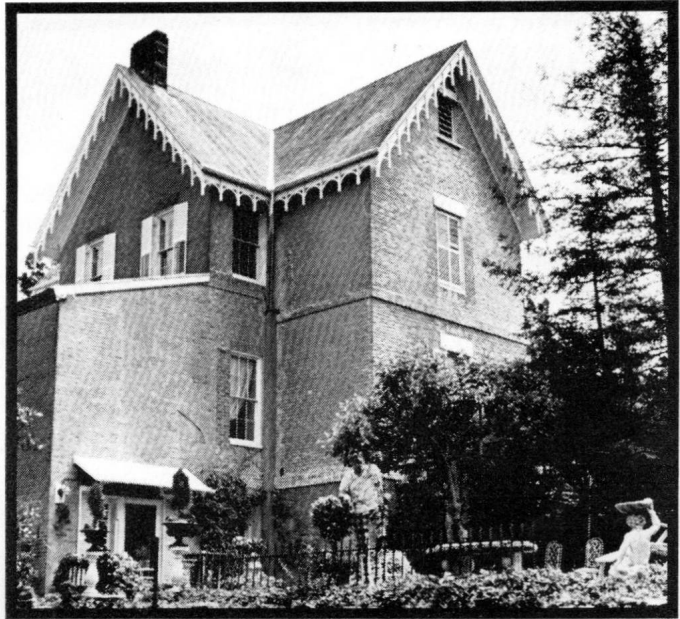
Even more important from a monetary standpoint, sheriff's deputies duties included collection of the foreign miners tax, enacted by the state in 1850. The tax was highly unpopular among the large segment of non-citizen miners who paid the \$4 per-month fee under protest, and some balked at paying it at all. Thorn, who received 15 percent of the tax monies he collected, took whatever measures necessary to obtain payment.

Calaveras gold rush miner Wade Hampton Johnston recalls Deputy Sheriff Thorn bringing to Johnston's cabin on Willow Creek in 1856, "a big Chilean miner whose head was bleeding. "He said," ' here's a man who owes me two tax payments, I asked him for them and he showed fight, so I hit him over the head two or three times with a six-shooter.' "

Thorn then pulled a goose quill from his pocket and had me weigh it. It contained \$5.75. Thorn said, " ' Now, I'll take that gold and give him credit for one tax payment, and when he pays me the rest, I'll credit him for the other.' "2

Later, when tax collection responsibilities were removed from the jurisdiction of the sheriff, Thorn ran for and was elected township assessor-tax collector, a position he held until he was elected sheriff in 1867.

Although deputized, Thorn retained ownership of his mining claims which he worked with hired labor. Later in life he owned a mining claim near Fricot City on which he hired a miner to work.



**The Thorn mansion, still an imposing structure
(Photo by Sharon Daniels)**

After pinning on his deputy's badge Thorn wasted no time in taking up pursuit of criminals wanted for everything from horse theft to sluice box robbery and murder. He arrested many and ran trouble makers out of camp. One of his first major arrests was that of Howard Maupin, who had been wanted three years for murder.

Shortly thereafter, Big Sam Brown, who boasted of past killings, with his partner Bunty Owens, stabbed two Chileans to death during a card game in Upper Calaveritas. They wounded another man and shot a third man when the slain men's friends threatened them.

Thorn followed Brown to a cabin on O'Neil Creek and found him standing in the door with a rifle, ready to fire. Ignoring the fact that Brown was a known killer, the newly sworn deputy continued to advance, took Brown and Owens into custody and they were subsequently sentenced to prison. Brown upon his release, went to Virginia City where he was responsible for several murders. He finally was killed in Carson Valley by Henry Van Sickle, whom he had threatened to kill. 3

With a growing reputation as a peace officer, Thorn had a number of brushes with death, but continued to run down wanted men and rid the area of criminals. Few were the days when there was not a cutting or a shooting. Among his early arrests was that of Pedro Ybarra, wanted for a string of robberies and murders.

In 1861 a convicted murderer being moved from the courtroom to his cell attacked Thorn and wrestled away his gun. With the revolver jabbing him in the ribs, Thorn fought for his life. Before his prisoner could cock and fire the pistol, Thorn

jabbed his forefinger up the man's nostril. With a scream of pain his assailant dropped the gun and grabbed the deputy's hand. Thorn managed to hold him until help arrived.

As stage robberies became more prevalent, Thorn was required to devote more time to running down the bandits who preyed on stages carrying Wells Fargo express boxes. He was instrumental in the arrest of Ramon Ruiz, said to have been a member of Joaquin Murietta's gang. He arrested "Big and Little Mitch," and their partner, "Old Joaquin," who robbed the Mokelumne Hill-Stockton and the Sonora-Milton stages. He followed David Parker all the way to Missouri to arrest him for the attempted robbery of "Buster," a Negro miner at San Antone Camp.

He arrested and later presided over the hanging in the jail yard, in San Andreas, of Jose Coyado, for the attempted robbery and murder of Petticoat Mine Superintendent Kinney Said. He also arrested John Thayer in 1878, for robbery of the Sonora Milton stage and recovered \$1,200. The list of Thorn's exploits is far too long to enumerate in this short article.

"Ben Thorn never dogged it," said David Eltringham, of Douglas Flat, who as a boy of 14, assisted Thorn in the arrest of Amos Bierer, the Arizona Kid, participant in the 1894 stage robbery near Pool Station in which a young woman was fatally wounded.

On October 30, 1859, Ben Thorn married 21-year old Anna Meeks. Two years later he moved her into the pretentious, three story home he built on St. Charles Street in San Andreas, of brick hauled from Stockton. The new home, with 13 rooms and a spiral staircase, the finest in San Andreas at that time, was the subject of much talk among townspeople concerning how a man drawing a deputy sheriff's salary could afford such an expensive dwelling.

There was considerable suspicion that more than Thorn's share of the tax monies he collected had stuck to his fingers. In fact, when he ran for Sheriff in 1867, his alleged siphoning off of tax monies became a serious campaign issue. The Calaveras Chronicle pointed out that San Andreas Township where Thorn collected taxes, had 600 registered voters and an assessed valuation of \$350,000, yet he had turned in only \$2,892. Jenny Lind Township, with few more than 100 voters and an assessed valuation of \$127,000 had paid \$2,900.

The Chronicle predicted that Thorn would make a poor showing, but when election day arrived he defeated incumbent Sheriff James Oliphant by 158 votes. Thorn was repeatedly reelected until 1875 when loss of the Democratic Party support and an unfortunate incident involving his wounding of former County Supervisor A.H. Coulter, with whom he had a long standing dispute, resulted in his failure to receive the nomination.

On January 31 of that year Thorn, who said someone had been stealing his chickens, fired into the darkness when he heard a noise in his back yard. Coulter, who lived nearby and was crossing Thorn's yard, was hit by a bullet that broke his wrist. The shooting created considerable controversy and for a time,



Ornate fireplaces add elegance to the Thorn home
(Photo by Sharon Daniels)

put the sheriff in a bad light. ⁴ Thorn spent the next two years operating his mining properties and as a special agent, assisted Wells Fargo's James Hume in running down stage robbers.

In 1879 Thorn ran for sheriff as an independent and was elected handily. He continued to be reelected and served as sheriff until his retirement in 1903.

Sheriff Thorn continued to wage a war on crime sometimes traveling considerable distances out of county to track down wanted men. During his law enforcement career he killed several men. In 1857 he shot and killed a Chileano named Molino who had killed a blacksmith, after Molino resisted arrest and attempted to escape. He followed a man named Charles Williams, wanted for a West Point robbery and shooting, all the way to Princeton, in Mariposa County and killed Williams when the wanted man attacked him with an axe. He presided over at least three hangings in the old jail yard and sent invitations written on his business cards, to newsmen and selected local citizens.

Meanwhile, Thorn and his wife, Anna, were rearing a family. Their daughter Edith, was born September 15, 1861, and their other child Susan, was born in 1866. Both girls grew into highly respected young women. Edith, in 1885, married Adolph Soher,

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a postal department official in San Francisco. Susan married Joseph Tilden, also of San Francisco.

Ben Thorn's brother, Abbott, who had followed him to California, in later years, became one of Ben's trusted deputies. Probably Thorn's most publicized case involved the arrest of the infamous stage robber, Black Bart (Charles Boles) who committed at least 28 stage robberies in eight years. Actually, Thorn played a small part in Bart's arrest. He claimed to have found Bart's flour sack mask, a derby hat and handkerchief at the scene of Bart's last robbery in 1883.

Thorn also later claimed to have obtained Black Bart's confession which sent him to prison. However, Charley Fontana, of Copperopolis, who arrived at the robbery scene before Thorn, said it was he who found the handkerchief and other evidence which he turned over to the Wells Fargo agent in Copperopolis. Wells Fargo Special Agent Harry Morse is credited with obtaining Black Bart's confession. ⁵

It was the June 15, 1893 slaying in Amador County of Wells Fargo shotgun messenger Mike Tovey by an unknown assailant that ultimately cost Thorn respect and the friendship of his longtime associate, Wells Fargo's James Hume. Tovey was killed by a rifle shot as the stage was nearing Jackson. The gunman fled and investigators found few clues. However, Sheriff Thorn on July 12 arrested William Evans, an ex-convict, on a ranch near Camp Seco and charged him with Tovey's murder.

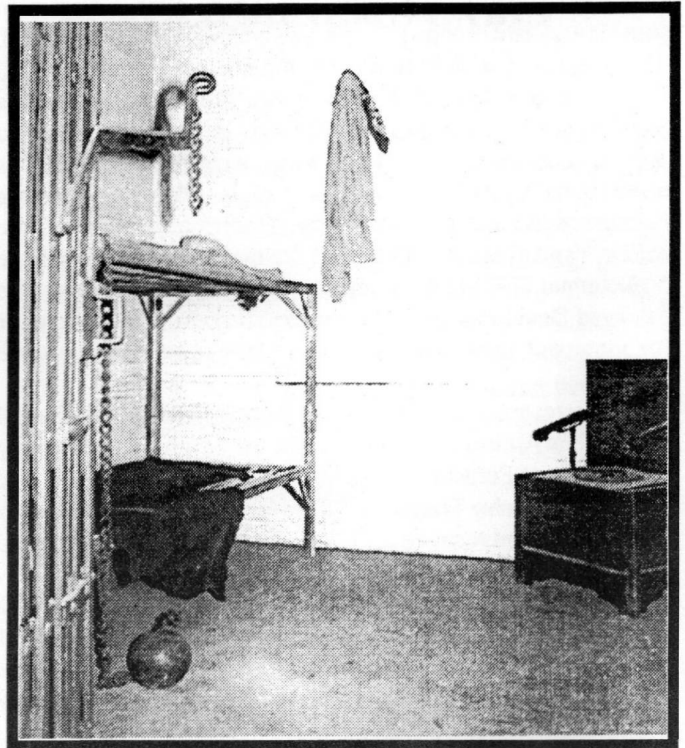
James Hume, who had arrived from San Francisco, said he had already talked to Evans, and he was innocent. Nevertheless, Thorn continued to hold Evans in the Calaveras County Jail and on August 1, announced that Evans had confessed the killing. He turned Evans over to Amador County authorities.

Hume protested, said Thorn told him he had furnished Evans whiskey and opium and used a fake newspaper article and a forged letter to obtain the confession. Thorn later admitted the accusation, but despite Hume's protests, Evans was brought to trial in Amador County and found guilty after Thorn testified against him. A judge eventually threw out Evan's conviction, but Thorn's and Hume's friendship had come to an end. ⁶

Nevertheless, Ben Thorn was admired and looked up to by a great majority of the county's populace. Calaveras County Sheriff Joe Zwinge, who held that office during the 1920's and 30's, recalled as a small boy, seeing and admiring Sheriff Thorn. "He'd come riding down the street on that big black horse and I decided right then, I wanted to be a sheriff just like him."

Thorn went on enforcing the law and continued to crack down on the few remaining stage robbers. But, there were those, including at least one of his former deputies, who said that after his break with James Hume he became somewhat more selective. Goey Hench, of Copperopolis, said Thorn made no great effort to solve the robbery of a stage if clues pointed to locals whose families represented a substantial bloc of voters. ⁷

Sheriff Thorn, at age 74, and ailing, retired in 1903. In latter



The Calaveras County Jail provided no frills.

years he often walked with a cane. His wife, Anna died on June 4, 1904, in San Francisco, at the home of her daughter, Edith. Ben, who also had moved to that city to live with their daughters, died in November, 1905. Both he and Anna were interred there in a family plot.

Ben Thorn's brother, Abbott, continued to live in the Thorn Mansion until his death at age 68, on May 1, 1907. He was found dead in his bedroom after he failed one morning to show up at the Metropolitan Hotel, where he took his meals.

The home remained in the family ownership for a number of years, then sold. It remains a San Andreas landmark, still one of the most elegant dwellings in that foothill community.

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THE MINERS WHO MOVED MOUNTAINS

Hydraulic mining ceased in Calaveras County nearly a century ago but scars left in its wake remain starkly visible along its hillsides and canyon walls today. Travel any highway or winding road through the Calaveras gold country from Wallace to Murphys - from Rail Road Flat to Jenny Lind - and evidence of the power of those great water nozzles capable of virtually washing away mountains becomes apparent even to the casual eye.

The hydraulic method of recovering gold from tertiary gravel channels (ancient buried river beds) did not come into general use early in the southern mines.

Edward E. Mattison on his claim at American Hill, north of Nevada City, is credited with being the first, early in 1853, to use a pressurized stream of water to wash gold bearing gravel through sluice boxes in large quantity. Transporting water by ditch, Mattison turned it into a penstock that fed a four or five-inch canvas hose to which was attached a sheet iron nozzle.¹

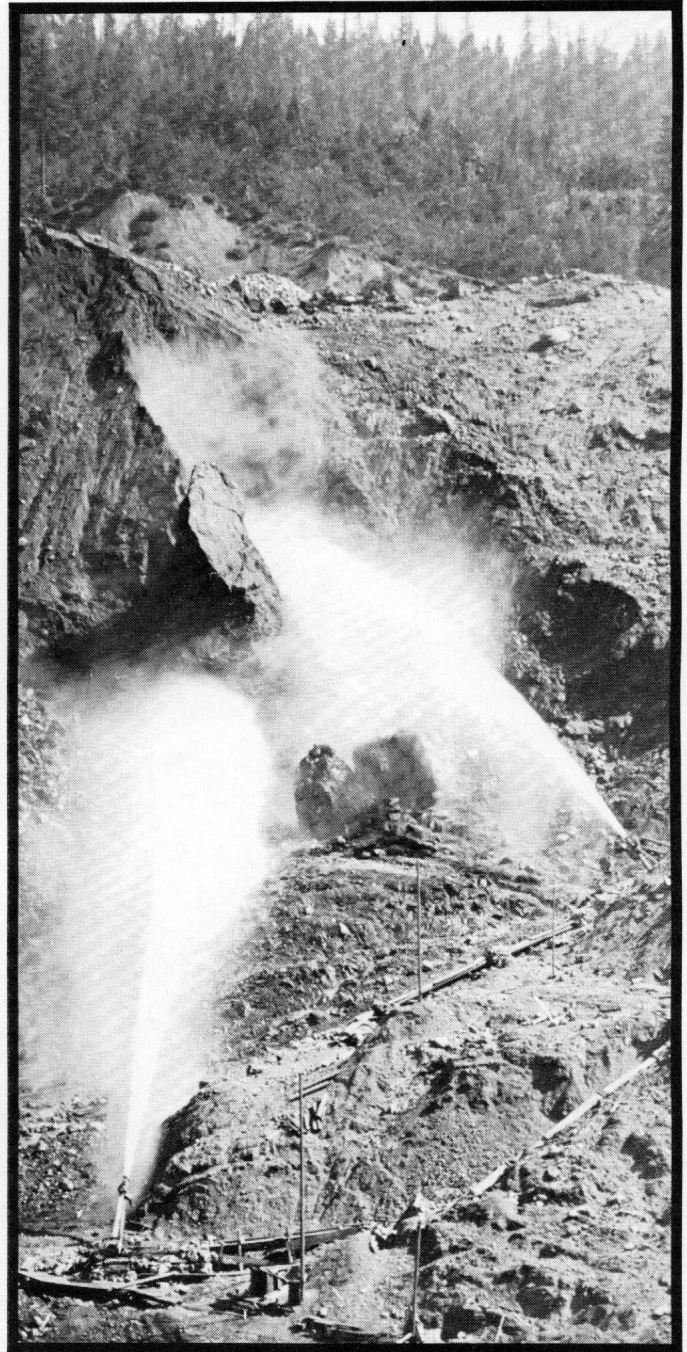
The jet of water undercut and caved a 40-foot gravel bank. The gravel was washed down a channel cut into the bedrock, into the sluice boxes fitted with riffles that caught the gold. The same method was introduced a short time later at Yankee Jim's, in Placer County, by Col. William McClure, who had visited Mattison's diggings.

A Maj. Case (no first name) was reported to have inaugurated hydraulic mining on his claim at Stockton Hill, at the western edge of Mokelumne Hill, in late 1853. Although it was a small operation--he used canvas hose and nozzle--he said the hydraulic system did the work of ten men. Where his operation on Stockton Hill was located is unknown, and how he brought water to it was not explained.²

Mattison's and McClure's operations which utilized not more than 50 miners' inches of water and Maj. Case's, which was probably even smaller, were minute when compared to the hydraulic mines of the 1880's and 90's. The use of canvas hoses soon gave way to iron pipe, which by the 1880's had increased in diameter to 20 inches or more at the larger hydraulic mines and were capable of delivering 1,000 to 1,500 miners' inches of water to one of the big nozzles.

A miners' inch of water comprised roughly, the amount passed through a one-inch square aperture in a box in which a constant water level six inches above the upper edge of the aperture was maintained. A miners' inch flowing steadily for 24 hours was estimated to equal from 2,230 to 2,274 cubic feet, or 17,000 gallons of water. One hundred miners' inches would constitute in 24 hours, 1,700,000 gallons.³

The iron hydraulic nozzle, generally called "Monitor," or "Giant," after the trade names given them by their manufacturers, came into common use during the 1860's. Some threw streams of water so powerful they would toss boulders about



Hydraulic mining literally did move mountains.

like pebbles. It was quickly found that hydraulicing was the cheapest and most effective way of extracting gold from the buried river channels and during the 40 years it flourished, it virtually washed mountains away.

Miles of ditches and pipeline was built to bring water to the mining operations. By 1854, Calaveras County had 17 ditch

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HYDRAULIC, cont. from pg. 34

systems totaling 325 miles in length, to supply water for ground sluicing and hydraulic mining. As the more shallow, easily worked alluvial deposits were depleted, more and more mining companies and individuals turned to hydraulic mining to work the deeper tertiary channels.⁴

In order to wash the immense deposits of gold bearing gravels in and around Mokelumne Hill and Chili Gulch a group of investors and mine owners on Nov. 16, 1852, formed the Mokelumne Hill Canal and Mining Company to bring mining water to the area.

They issued 1,500 shares of stock at \$100 per share to finance the project and built 16 miles of ditch from the South Fork of the Mokelumne River to Mokelumne Hill. The ditch was quickly extended to Chili Gulch and Old Women Gulch, south of Mokelumne Hill.⁵

In 1854 the ditch was extended to Campo Seco and more miles of ditch were added to bring water to Central Hill, three miles northwest of San Andreas. This system eventually became the Mokelumne River Power and Water Company that not only brought early day mining water, but provided domestic water to Mokelumne Hill until it sold to the newly formed Calaveras Public Utility District in the 1930's.

The Clark Ditch, built in 1856 by R.V. Clark, a civil engineer, took water from the South Fork of the Mokelumne River beneath Blue Mountain, to provide water to the Rail Road Flat, Independence, Glencoe and Rich Gulch mining areas. When completed, it was 55 miles long.⁶

The Salt Spring Reservoir in western Calaveras County, owned by the Boston Hydraulic Mining Company during those years provided water for hydraulicing in South Gulch, Whiskey Hill, Bunker Hill, North Star and the Molly diggings in and around Jenny Lind. Jenny Lind mine owners banded together to drive a 2,000-foot tunnel to bring water for hydraulicing to their area. A 500-foot aqueduct was built in 1857 to carry water across the Calaveras River there.

Other major ditches in Calaveras County, not including the Utica Ditch which brought water to the Murphys area, included the Table Mountain Ditch, the old Box Ditch that took water from O'Neil Creek at Upper Calaveritas, as did the Pillsbury Ditch. The Georgia Ditch took water from San Antonio Creek and the Yaqui Ditch from San Antonio Creek, was one of the earlier suppliers of water, cut in 1852.

From Maj. Case's first hydraulic mining efforts at Stockton Hill it is believed the method spread to other claims, including Chili Gulch, wherever there was adequate water. Water was always a problem in Calaveras County.

Most hydraulic mining operations in Calaveras remained relatively small because of the lack of water throughout much of the year. However the method continued to spread. The miners quickly learned that in many of the deep old river channels the gravel was tightly cemented by manganese and other minerals,

making it difficult for even the powerful jets of water from the big monitors to dislodge and break it up in sufficient quantity. They solved that problem by driving powder drifts, small tunnels with a T-shaped cross-cut at their ends, which they blasted with great quantities of black powder.

As the hydraulic pipe and monitors grew larger the sluice boxes also grew bigger. Often they were more than four feet deep and four or more feet wide. Cross riffles, sometimes made of iron, or sometimes by laying large, thick pieces of flat stone on the bottom of the sluice to form crevices, caught and held the gold. And, great quantities of quicksilver (mercury) was used in what were called quicksilver traps, to catch the fine gold.

In the larger hydraulic pits two or three nozzles were used. One did the undercutting and washing down of the gravel banks that might be anywhere from 20, 60 or 80 feet high, and the others were used as sweeps, to boom the gravel down the bed-rock races (trenches) into the sluice boxes.

Miles of water ditches and great quantities of large-bore iron pipe were needed. It quickly became apparent to both purchasers and suppliers of the hydraulic pipe that iron pipe fabricated in the San Francisco Bay area or even Stockton or Sacramento was too costly and could not be hauled to the mines in large enough quantities. That problem also was solved. The pipe material was shipped to the mines in flat sheets and at the mine blacksmith shops, it was placed in machines that rolled it into cylindrical form and held it while it was riveted.

Major Calaveras County gold bearing channels included the Central Hill, Fort Mountain, Deep Blue Lead and a host of smaller rich channels, a majority of which lay in the Mokelumne Hill area. They included the Concentrator, Gopher, Kraemer, Corral Flat, Tunnel Ridge and Stockton Hill. There were many more, but they were sluiced or drift mined, rather than hydraulic mined.

The Central Hill Channel was probably the Calaveras area's single most significant producer of deep channel gold. It followed a circuitous route from the Murphys-Vallecito area toward the southwest to a point north of Altaville, then westward toward Calaveritas and San Andreas where it took a northward course, toward Mokelumne Hill. From the Mokelumne Hill area it turned to what became known as the Central Hill mining area three miles northwest of San Andreas and went on to Toyon, near where the present Middle School is located. There, the Central Hill Channel spilled and enriched much of the area to the south and west.

The Central Hill was mined in various areas by both hydraulic and drift mining. And where it spilled its values it fed countless small creeks and rills that during early gold rush years provided rich ground sluicing. The Calaveras Central Gold Mine, the county's largest underground gravel mine, at the northern edge of Altaville, and the Vallecito Western, both are on the Central Hill Channel. Recreational gold prospectors with gold pans or rockers, still can often be observed working in the little creek at the foot of North Branch Hill, on Highway 12 west of San Andreas, where some Central Hill mines poured their tailings.

The Fort Mountain Channel stretched from West Point and Rail Road Flat across Esperanza and Jesus Maria Creeks, then followed a course to Mountain Ranch and on southward to tie into the Central Hill Channel near Calaveritas. The El Dorado, Lampson and Independence Channels were among its tributaries.

Mokelumne Hill probably contained the largest conglomeration of ancient river channels of any area in the county. The rich finds made there during early gold rush days—miners mining began there in 1848—came from gold that spilled from those channels.

To accurately determine how many hydraulic mining operations there were in Calaveras County between the late 1850's and the early part of this century would be an impossibility. Although none of the hydraulic mines here began to approach the size of those in Nevada, Yuba, Plumas or Placer Counties, Calaveras still had some 20 major operations during its 40-year hydraulic mining period.

Among the county's larger mines was the Sport Hill, on Old Woman Gulch and Shaw-Duryea, in Chili Gulch. The Duryea, owned and operated in latter years by James Duryea, had walls 160 feet high. Both the Sport Hill and Duryea were open in the 1860's. By the time Duryea had ceased hydraulic mining in 1876, it was said to have produced a half-million dollars.⁷

Early gold mines of the Mokelumne Hill area included North Star and the Gopher. Their relatively shallow pits can be seen from Highway 26 at Happy Valley, a mile east of Mokelumne Hill. Both were noted for their course gold. Tales passed down by early settlers allege that gold was found there in the 1830's and 40's by Hudson Bay trappers who wintered there long before James Marshall's discovery of gold at Coloma.

In the Calaveritas area the Barnhardt Mine was operated by the Peirano and Cadematori families. The Calaveritas Hill operated until 1900, and the Railroad Hill, hydrauliced by Giana and Luigi Demartini, ran from 1895 until 1904 under permit from the State Debris Commission. The Cuneo-Bartholomew Hydraulic mine also operated after turn-of-the-century, south of Mountain Ranch.

Water from the Ide-Terwilliger Ditch brought San Antonio Creek water to the hillside below Fricot Road, upstream from

Fourth Crossing, where Henry Angel, founder of Angels Camp and his partner, Henry O'Dell, were hydraulicing. The hydraulic pit can still be seen from Fricot Road.

The Balaklava, Avalanche and another mine named Central Hill, were hydrauliced in the Vallecito area. There were large hydraulic mines on O'Neil and McKinney Creeks, in the Cave City area and near Sheep Ranch and Rail Road Flat. There was some hydraulicing north of Milton and the Barton Mine at Wallace, was hydrauliced during its early years.

The amount of gold that hydraulic mining produced in Calaveras County is unknown. Records prior to 1880 were incomplete and often inaccurate, and from 1880 to 1896, gold production statistics did not separate placer and lode gold.

A 1938 State Division of Mines report estimated the value of placer gold mined in Calaveras between 1848 and 1896 at



Hydraulic mining near Mountain Ranch, circa 1880.
(Calaveras County Archives)

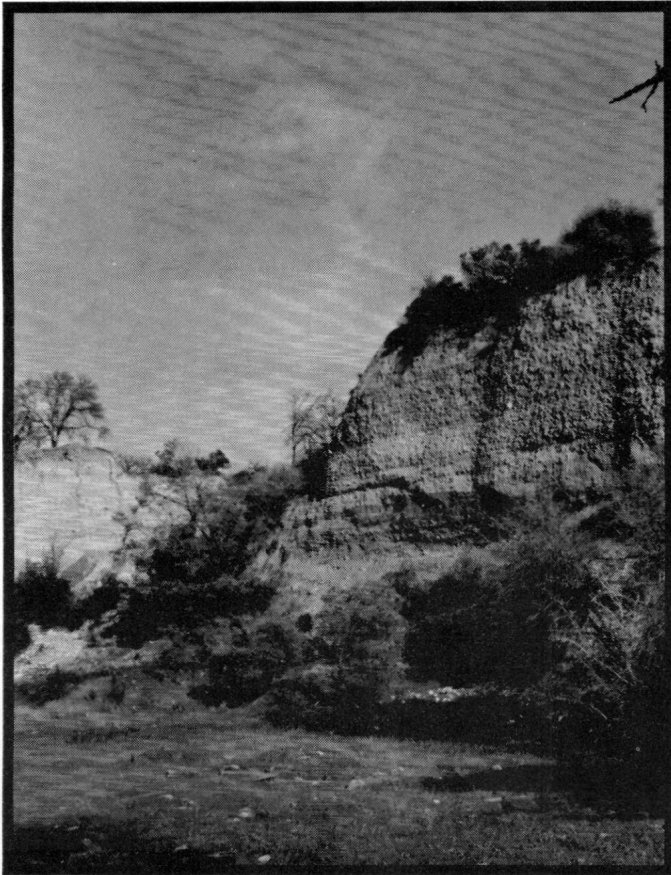
\$75,000,000. Between 1880 and 1905 (during the height of the hydraulic mining activity) it is estimated Calaveras produced \$8,000,000 in placer gold. Of that figure, the hydraulic mines probably contributed a substantial share.⁸

Hydraulic mining was popular among owners of gold bearing placer properties where the method could be applied, because it was cheap. It required little manpower; vast quantities of gravel and its earthen overburden could be washed away at minimum cost, allowing even low grade deposits to be profitably worked.

However, hydraulic mining had its down side.

As canvas hoses and sheet iron nozzles gave way to the big, commercially manufactured "Monitors" and "Little Giants," and pipelines that fed them increased from eight, ten or 12 inches to

Please see **HYDRAULIC**, pg. 37



Walls of Calaveritas hydraulic pit still stand.

HYDRAULIC, cont. from pg. 36

two feet or more in diameter, the tailings "slickens" from the hydraulic diggings came boiling down the tail races and turned the rivers red. The yardage washed down by the big nozzles grew to an astronomical figure.

Tiny foothill rills below the hydraulic pits which during even historic storms had never been too wide for a man to jump across, overflowed with thick, red slickens that spilled onto and covered agricultural land.

The tailings choked streams and actually raised by many feet, the level of rivers such as the Mokelumne, Cosumnes, American, Yuba and the Feather. They essentially choked the Sacramento River, hindered navigation and added to the valley's flood problems. Valley and lower foothill ranchers, valley businessmen and residents, arose in wrath.

The first step to shut down hydraulic mining came in the form of the Sawyer Decision, in 1884. In the case of Woodruff vs. North Bloomfield Gravel Mining Company, U.S. Circuit Judge Lorenzo Sawyer issued a decree prohibiting the dumping of debris into the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers or their

OLD MINER'S CABIN IS COMING HOME

A Calaveras County miner's cabin on exhibit in the San Francisco Mint building which a quarter-century ago was turned into a gold rush museum, is coming home.

During the mid-1970's operators of the museum, housed in the huge, granite walled building at Fifth and Mission Streets where beginning in 1854, untold millions in gold and silver from Mother Lode and Comstock mines was turned into coin, sent out a request for miner's cabin to become part of the museum display. They made public their request through stories in newspapers published in the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys and the Mother Lode. A story in the Stockton Record's

tributaries.

Action against hydraulic mines throughout much of the gold country soon followed. Some mines continued to operate and in 1893, California legislator Anthony Caminetti, of Amador County, pushed through a bill creating the California Debris Commission. This legislation allowed hydraulic mines, under the watchful eye of the debris commission, to continue mining while constructing debris dams to hold back their tailings. Some mines constructed "brush dams," which to an extent, held back the mine waste, but they usually washed out during winter's high water.

One of the few permanent debris dams constructed to hold back tailings was built in this county on McKinney Creek, at Cave City, in 1910, by the Baldwin Mining Company, to contain waste from the Massenhean Mine. The stone and concrete structure, filled with tailings, still stands.

One by one, the mines closed. Some were worked out, others became victims of water rights disputes, but most closed rather than face possibility of legal action and court litigation.

A few, that contained gravel deposits of sufficient value, turned to underground mining. But, long before the start of World War I, in 1914, hydraulic mining had come to a permanent halt in Calaveras County.

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Mother Lode section drew a quick response.

The late John Huberty of San Andreas, member of a pioneer Calaveras County family, owned just a cabin that he was willing to donate. Through the newspaper, he was put in touch with the Mint Museum officials.

The old cabin, located on the south bank of the North Fork of the Calaveras River, although built in the early 1930's, was typical of the one-room dwellings that had sheltered miners and gold prospectors since gold rush days. Furthermore, it contained virtually all the furnishings and artifacts that would have been used by a miner living in a remote area during the 19th or early 20th Century. Museum officials arrived in San Andreas, viewed the rustic, clapboard structure and decided it was exactly what they were looking for.

Cabin and artifacts were donated by Huberty in memory of his mother, Mary Ann Donnallan Huberty and his aunt, Nellie A Donnallan Nuner, daughters of John and Ellen Donnallan, early day pioneers who purchased land in the Calaveras area in 1861. Cabin furnishings that went as part of the donation included an early day iron cook stove, kerosene lamps, iron framed bed, old handmade quilts, old cooking utensils, wash tub and metal scrub board, a table containing drawers and a flour-bin, rough-hewn cabinets and a variety of mining tools. The cabin was dismantled board-by-board, transported to the Mint and reconstructed, with all of its contents, inside one of the huge steel and concrete vaults on the ground floor of the Mint building.

There, the old cabin of weather beaten lumber attracted the considerable attention of the museum visitors. Other artifacts donated from various Calaveras County sources included books, an old iron wheeled foundry cart, a huge iron kettle in which companies of Chinese miners many have boiled their rice, and pieces of period furniture.

However, a decision by the Federal Government's General Services Administration, in charge of the Mint building, to close the museum as of December 30, 1994, created a serious question concerning what was to be done with the artifacts and exhibits which the museum housed. From that time until a few months ago, status of the various exhibits donated by individuals, organizations and entities from throughout the West, remained in limbo.

Then, early this year it was decided that artifacts not wanted by other federal or governmental museums would be returned to their original donors or at least, to organizations lying within the original counties from which they were donated.

Among the first to become aware of the situation and that artifacts donated from Calaveras might be returned to this county was long time Calaveras County Historical Society member Eloise Ponte. For nearly two years she and her husband, Gloyd "Bud" Ponte, a past-president of the historical society, pursued return of the local artifacts.

Some two months ago Mrs. Ponte was informed that through her efforts, return of the Calaveras artifacts to the Calaveras County Historical Society was under consideration. Then, shortly

STEPHEN P. TEALE

He healed rich and poor alike, and he was Calaveras County's elder statesman.

The death in early February of retired doctor and State Senator Stephen P. Teale represents a loss to every resident of Calaveras County and brings sorrow to those of us who knew him.

Stephen Teale was well known to members of the Calaveras County Historical Society. He not only was familiar with our county's history, he himself made history here and he will be fondly remembered.

He came to West Point during its roisterous post-war years when there was no doctor closer than 30 miles and established a medical practice there. He treated the injured and the ill, and no one can count the number of newborns he ushered into the world. And, the last thing he ever asked--if he bothered to ask at all--was whether they were able to pay for his services.

Doctor Teale with a handful of others, helped establish Calaveras County's Mark Twain Hospital. He was elected to the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors when it appeared that the West Point area needed adequate representation. Later, elected to the California State Senate where he represented an area larger than some of this nation's smaller states, he served for more than two decades with distinction. Stephen Teale was a registered Democrat, but his concern for the people of his county and his district transcended party lines. In Calaveras County he was everyone's legislator.

Senator Teale's personal life was not without its tragedy. He lost his wife, also a doctor, and two young sons in a fatal auto accident some 30 years ago. Grief stricken, he overcame his loss, continued to represent his area in the legislature, eventually remarried and helped rear a new family.

"Steve" Teale, as he was known to his multitude of friends and associates, has left a lasting mark in Calaveras County. He will be long remembered.

after March 1, Society President Barbara Beaman was informed by General Services representatives that the cabin, its contents, and the other local artifacts, were ours.

On March 10, a group led by Historical Society Office Manager Sheryl Waller, that included former board member George Beaman, Fara Noble of San Andreas, and George Hoepfer, editor of Las Calaveras, went to San Francisco and returned virtually all of the Calaveras artifacts. Plans are underway for a second trip to obtain the cabin itself and the few remaining artifacts. Volunteers to help dismantle the cabin and return it to Calaveras County would be appreciated. It is hoped the cabin can be reassembled as a permanent exhibit in San Andreas.

LION HUNTER JAY BRUCE PROWLED CALAVERAS HILLS

By
The Editor

In his old screen sided Dodge truck that provided transportation for him and his dogs he was a familiar figure in Calaveras County and throughout the Mother Lode. For nearly 30 years Jay Bruce served as state lion hunter, to become virtually a living legend along the western slope of the Sierra.

Periodically--more often if needed-- he with his pack of hounds drifted through the Calaveras area to take a marauding lion here or there and to keep their population under control. Those were the days--the 1920's, 30's and into the 40's, when cattlemen and other livestock owners along with sportsmen and game managers, quoted the axiom that "the only good mountain lion was a dead mountain lion." (Today, many rural residents still agree.)

During his career in a territory that sometimes ranged from near the Mexican border to Lassen County, Bruce took a total of 669 of the big cats. Woodsman, tireless hunter and outdoorsman, Bruce although unschooled in the academics of biology and zoology, probably knew as much about the habits and life cycle of the mountain lion (cougar) as any man living at that time.

Born of pioneer stock, Jay Bruce was one of five children who knew hardship and poverty as they grew up on a homestead near Mariposa County's Clark Station (now Wawona) at the south edge of Yosemite Park. His father, Albert Bruce, as a child arrived in California near end of the gold rush period and in 1872, married 18-year-old school teacher Azealia Van Campen. By 1880 a road was being built into Yosemite from the south, with headquarters at what is now Wawona. Albert Bruce brought his family there and went to work for station owner and road builder Galen Clark. He homesteaded 160 acres nearby, built a crude cabin of log slabs from a nearby sawmill, but a dispute with Clark over filing of the homestead cost him his job.

Bruce left his family on the remote homestead while he worked as a mechanic at various Mother Lode gold mines. Sometimes he was gone for months.

"It was pretty meagre living," Jay Bruce, youngest of the five children, recalled in latter years. "We lived on corned beef and canned salmon and what we could grow in the garden. My mother now and then would give a nearby Indian family a few rifle cartridges and then we would have a haunch of venison."

At an early age young Bruce fell heir to an old Cap and ball revolver, and later, a single-shot .22 rifle. From then on, the Bruce family's menu improved as squirrels, quail, grouse and sometimes deer, fell to his guns. In winter he and his brother trapped fur bearing animals. He also found that guests at the newly opened Wawona Hotel would pay good money--some-



Jay Bruce, 1932, in uniform he seldom wore.

times as much as a dollar or two--for tanned rattlesnake hides.

At age 15 he gave up a job milking 25 cows twice-a-day to provide the hotel a daily supply of trout for its guests, an occupation more remunerative and far more enjoyable. However, that ended when the state legislature enacted a law prohibiting commercial catching and sale of trout. Bruce, out of school, found employment in gold mines and when 19, tried the oil fields, but it was not steady work.

In 1910 Jay Bruce married Katherine Fournier. He found work wherever he could, but jobs were scarce. He tried guiding hunters and fishermen but that too, was seasonal, and paying clients were not plentiful. An attempt to operate a small sawmill ended in disagreement with a partner.

In his early 30's, Jay Bruce was finding that making a living for his family in remote Mariposa County was not easy. During the fall of 1913, a neighbor told Bruce he planned to shoot a pair of young Airedale terriers because he could no longer afford to feed them. Bruce, really in no financial condition to provide food for two big dogs, rather than see them killed, took them off his hands. He named the dogs Eli and Brute.

Winter arrived, snow fell, and Jay Bruce was again out of work. One morning he found mountain lion tracks in the snow



Bruce with biggest lion taken...160 pounds.
(Courtesy of Nevada Jim Ornellas)

not far from his home. Having no idea what the two Airedales might do, Bruce took a rifle and his dogs and put them on the fresh track. Proving himself a natural hunter, Eli took the lion track. By afternoon, Bruce had a mountain lion for which the state would pay \$40 bounty and a lion hide worth another \$25.

Eli proved to be an exceptional lion dog and Brute was aggressive when a lion was treed or held at bay. During the first three winters he hunted lions, mostly in Mariposa and Tuolumne Counties, Jay Bruce and his two dogs took 31 of the big cats. By 1915, he was spending most of his time lion hunting. He continued to guide fishermen and hunters in summer and fall. During the winter of 1917-18 he took another 10 lions. He also expanded his hunting area on occasion, to include Calaveras, Alpine and Mono Counties. He captured several lion cubs which he sold to zoos. A young female lion his dogs captured was given to Yosemite Park where she lived for 15 years.

The close of World War I saw Jay Bruce's reputation as a lion hunter growing. At Yosemite he met National Park Director Steve Mather and in December, 1918, the State Fish and Game Commission appointed him to the newly created post of State Lion Hunter. He was placed on a salary and allowed to keep and sell hides of the lions he took. By that time Bruce had increased his pack of lion dogs to include several keen nose trailing hounds. He still used Airedales to help hold lions at bay.

Although his home remained in Mariposa County, Bruce's state job vastly expanded his area of operations. He traveled from county to county, following a somewhat loose schedule, but he was quick to respond to complaints of lion depredations in individual areas. He hunted generally from Fresno and Tulare Counties to Tehama and Lassen Counties.

Bruce usually made a late summer trip through Calaveras County and almost always took a lion or two. He hunted the Arnold-Big Trees, Ganns and Bear Valley areas. He regularly took lions in the West Point and Blue Creek country and the North, South and Middle Forks of the Mokelumne River. He hunted Mattley Ridge and Bailey Ridge, named for the Carpen-

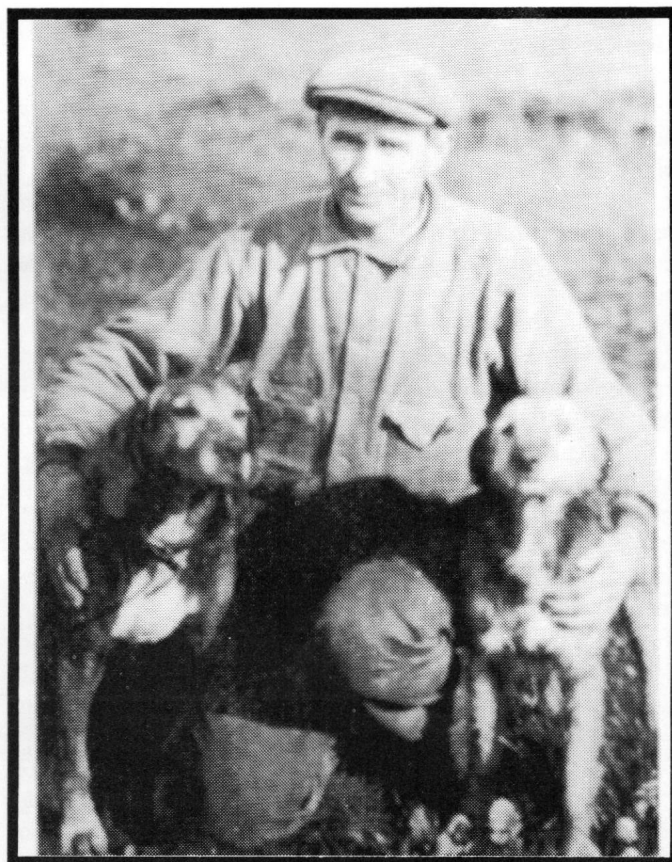
ter & Bailey Livestock Company of San Joaquin County, which in early days, summered horses there until giving it up because mountain lions were taking so many colts.

Irvin Tanner, of Murphys, recalls that when he was in grade school during the 1930's, Jay Bruce stopped at the old Murphys School to show the youngsters a pair of young lion cubs he had found and planned to turn over to a zoo.

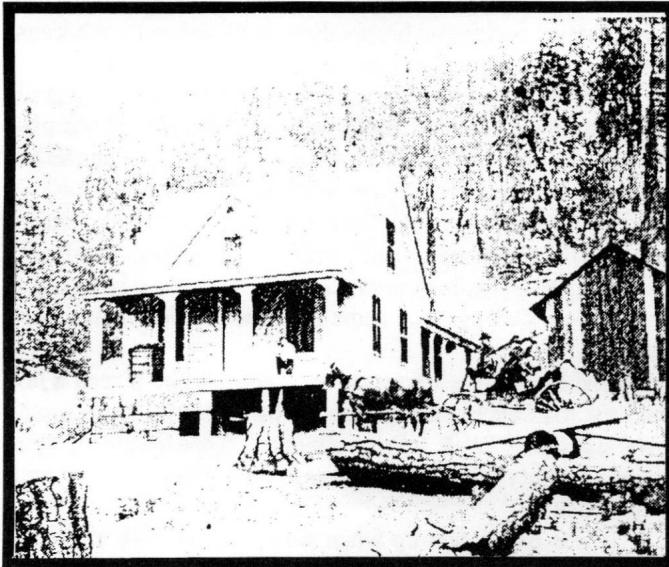
Eighty-three- year old John Burgess of Murphys, remembers vividly as a young man, going on a hunt with Jay Bruce. Burgess, then living in Sonora, said Bruce often ate breakfast in the old Gem Cafe, and he came to know the lion hunter quite well.

"One morning a fellow came in and said he'd seen a lion cross the road the night before up at Strawberry. Bruce turned to me and said, " 'Well, let's go get him.' "Then he added, " 'you better eat plenty of breakfast because there'll be no eating until we get back.' "

"It was barely sun-up when we left town. We arrived at mid-morning where the man had seen the lion. The dogs took the track right away and that cat--it was a big male--decided to leave the country. He headed into the South Fork of the Stanislaus



Jay Bruce with lion dogs Ranger and Eli.
(Courtesy of Nevada Jim Ornellas)



The Jay Bruce home near Wawona, (circa 1940)

BRUCE, Cont. from pg. 40

River Canyon, crossed the river and finally treed in a big fir.

It took us four hours to catch up with the dogs. I was about 26 years old and considered myself pretty tough--a good man in the mountains. But, I'll tell you, I had a hard time keeping up with that lion hunter who was 20 years older than I was.

Bruce shot the lion. By then, it was late afternoon and raining. I never saw anyone skin a lion as fast as he did. Still, it was dark when we got back to the truck. I was soaking wet and exhausted. I decided right there, no more mountain lion hunting for me. That Jay Bruce was on tough hombre."

During the 1930's the late Dave Dragone, then of Angels Camp, and a friend talked Jay Bruce into taking them on a lion hunt in the San Domingo Creek area near Murphys. Bruce's dogs picked up a track almost immediately and the chase was on. Despite their best efforts, Dragone and his friends began falling farther and farther behind Bruce and his dogs. Finally gasping for breath and losing ground rapidly, Dragone's friend asked, "do you think if we shot him in the leg we'd be able to keep up with him?"

When he hunted Calaveras County's Highway 4 corridor Bruce often stayed at Arnold's, at what is now the town of Arnold. He acquired Spike, one of his better dogs, in a trade with Mrs. Bob Arnold, whom he gave a tanned lion hide for the dog.

Lion hunting was not an easy occupation. Once, while following the trail of a mountain lion that had treed in steep, rocky bluffs, Bruce fell while negotiating a cliff. His serious injuries kept him off the trail for months. He lost the sight of his left eye when hit in the face by a jagged limb while trailing a lion near Uncle Tom's Cabin in the Rubicon River Canyon.

Bruce's first marriage ended in 1938 when his wife, with

THREE MINUTE LION HUNT

Not all of Jay Bruce's lion hunts became grueling, stamina testing races through mountainous terrain on the heels of his pack of baying hounds. Each fall Bruce visited Placer County's Foresthill area where this writer grew up. We youngsters, then in high school, came to know him well. He was an interesting, personable man, and of course there were those of us, particularly my buddy and I, who pleaded with him to take us lion hunting.

He never quite said, "no," but managed in one way or another without hurting our feelings to postpone any hunt to a later date. Then came the morning when my friend, who prefers to remain anonymous, was passing the cabin where Bruce stayed just as he was loading dogs into his screen sided truck. Apparently the old lion hunter could think of no excuse for a refusal. My friend had just time enough to run home and get a rifle he certainly did not need.

Into the mountains they rolled, the truck sending up a plume of the powdery red dust that blanketed the road, inches deep. Then, hardly 30 minutes and little more than 10 miles from town Bruce suddenly stomped on the brakes, brought his vehicle to a sudden halt.

There in the dust, tracks seemingly as large as saucers told them a mountain lion had recently crossed the road. Bruce climbed out, inspected the tracks, then returned to the truck and released a single, battle scarred, ragged eared old hound, veteran of countless lion encounters.

"Stay here," Bruce instructed my friend who still was seated in the truck, which remained parked in the middle of the road. The dog trotted forward.

Hound and hunter had barely disappeared into the trees when my buddy, still in the truck, heard the dog raise her voice in a single excited yelp. Her cry was followed by the sharp, spiteful bark of the .22 pistol Jay Bruce always carried.

Moments later, Jay Bruce emerged from the trees dragging a three-quarter grown mountain lion.

"Well," he said, "we got our mountain lion, let's go home."

their children grown, became tired of her husband's wandering woods oriented life style. But it was a life that Jay Bruce could not or would not give up. The mountains and the outdoors were part of him.

During his career, Jay Bruce took a total of 669 mountain lions. Approximately 40 of those were taken in Calaveras County during the 32 years he hunted.

Bruce remarried, and in 1947 at age of 66, retired. He and his wife for a number of years, lived in their home on Bear Creek, near Georgetown, in El Dorado County. Later, they moved to Hollister, where he passed away in the early 1960's.