



# HISTORY OF CAMANCHE

## CAMANCHE

By MRS. FRANK GENOCHIO

Situated in the foothills of the Sierras in the western tip of Calaveras County near the Mokelumne River is the town of Camanche. It was named after the town of Comanche, Iowa, by the Bovards, who moved here from that eastern city. Through a post office error the name was spelled with an "a", but no doubt it was originally taken from the Indian word "Comanche" as Indians of that tribe were located in that region of Iowa.

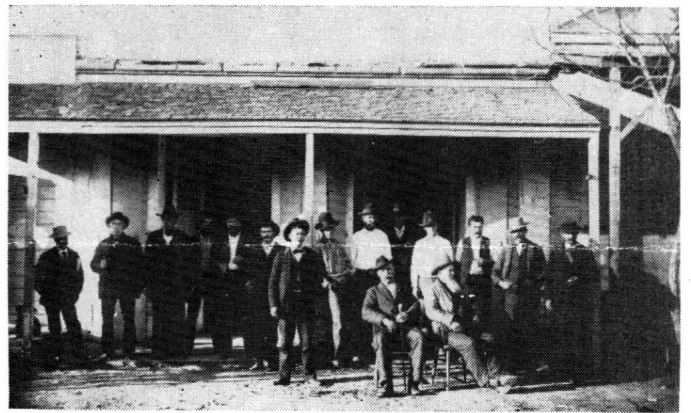
Just after the original gold rush of 1848, thousands of people migrated to the West in search of the precious metal. About 1851 and 1852 many came by river boat from San Francisco up the San Joaquin and Mokelumne Rivers. Originally, many gold seekers settled in Lancha Plana in Amador County but then a part of Calaveras County. Lancha Plana was named after the "flat boats" which plied between there and Poverty Bar on the opposite bank of the Mokelumne River, where many miners went after the supply of gold had given out at Lancha Plana. After the river miners and their families located on the bank of the great rushing river. After the river flooded and washed away most of Poverty Bar, many of the miners moved to Camanche.

One of the earliest families to settle in Camanche was the Duffy family who first moved to Campo Seco from San Francisco about 1856. Not satisfied with Campo Seco they moved down the river to what was then called "Limerich Camp." There were no white people located there as yet, but many Chinese miners and also many Indians were there. Later many white settlers moved in. The town grew by leaps and bounds, and soon there were many bars, stores, and even a Chinese Joss House.

The first Wells-Fargo (Warrington?) building and office was in the March store, later run by Mr. Zimmerman (Mr. Marcy's brother-in-law) in the store building that now

houses the warehouse of the Genochio Store. Through some misunderstanding with Mr. Zimmerman, the Wells-Fargo moved its office to Lodi.

The Duffy family had the first hotel. It was used for many years as a stop-over for the stages going from Lodi to Mokelumne Hill. This family also operated the livery



**IN THE GAY 1890'S**, in front of Camanche Store—Standing, left to right: Louie Bettencourt (Perry), Joe Gooding, John Storey, Art Fox, Bill Duffy, Tom Bacigalupi, Henry Cavagnaro, Bert Zimmerman, Mick Fox, Lin Northrup, Gene Zimmerman, George Whiteman, Jas. Mulgrew, Adrick Charroux. Seated: Lawrence Lawson, Mr. Cutter.

stable. Martin Duffy's daughter, Mary, was postmistress in Camanche for over 50 years. She passed away June 21, 1941.

The Zimmerman store was taken over by a Mr. Henry Crabtree who later sold it to Henry A. Cavagnaro and Milton Cockran. Bill and John Dougherty had a store where the Post Office is now. Mr. Lawson ran a saloon across

from the hotel. It is claimed there were as many as twenty bars in this community at one time; also five stores, two of which were run by Chinese.

About 1862 Andre Charroux who had come to Lancha Plana from Canada moved to Camanche. He bought an old store building and built a blacksmith shop and a family home. The latter still remains and is used by members of the family during the summer. His wife and two daughters joined him in 1863.

Both the Indians and the Chinese held big celebrations in the town every year. The Indians—known to the miners as "Digger Indians", but probably Miwuks—held pow-wows on the flat north of town. The Chinese celebrated their New Year with hundreds attending.

There were many conflicts among the foreign elements in Camanche. About 1865 the Chinese had a tong war or an open fight between two clans. They met on Main Street and fought with clubs and knives. Later, a trial was held in Armory Hall in Campo Seco in the Justice's Court. During the proceedings one Chinaman got up and shot another. Mr. Jeff Catewood of San Andreas was the attorney. He charged a fee of twenty-five dollars a day.

At another time a Mr. Conway antagonized the Chinese and they were going to scald him. He ran from Chinatown to Duffy's Hotel where Mr. Duffy saved him by hiding him in the cellar.

In addition to their mining, the Chinese engaged in gardening. Many fine gardens were in the upper part of town.

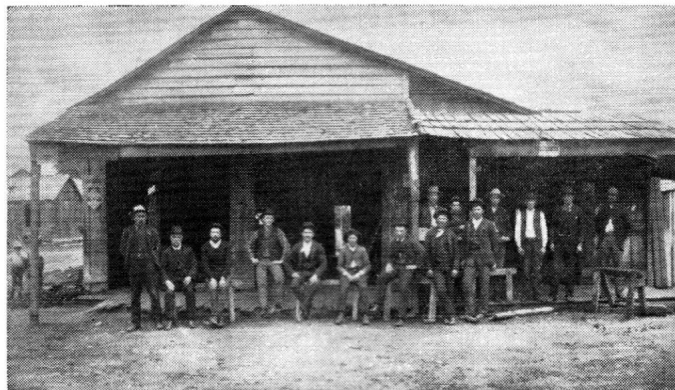
There were two Chinese stores in town; one run by E. Long in what is now the H. B. Cavagnaro home, and another that was destroyed by fire, was next door. This was run by Ye Yeck. Afterwards he moved across the street to where the Duffy duplex now stands. He later sold his store to Mr. Quong, who in turn sold to "Chinee" Joe, who ran it until about 1915.

E. Long was a Chinaman of higher caste. His business was to obtain mining contracts for the other Chinese. He returned to China and brought back a distinctive Chinese wife. The E. Longs both died in Camanche and were buried in the Chinese burial ground not far from where the Catholic Church now stands. There were two little boys in this family. Later they were taken to San Francisco.

There are many legends of the early Chinese. It is claimed that they buried treasure in several places. One was supposed to be buried at the corner of a pig pen in the H. B. Cavagnaro's back yard. Another was supposed to be buried under a tree in either the John Morrow's old home place or the Frank Genochio's yard. So far no one has located anything unusual, but there have been instances of gold coins being found in the yard where the Post Office now stands and of gold being found in the streets when the rain washed away much of the top soil. But those are all in the days of the past it's doubtful if there's any that hasn't been discovered many years ago.

Sue Lin was the only Chinese child to go to the local school. The pupils used to enjoy the cakes and candies she'd bring to school.

It is quite interesting to note that in those days there was a big mining ditch that supplied water to all these small communities. It was known as the Murray Ditch. It was originally built by a Captain Davis who lived at Poverty Bar, at a cost of \$150,000. One branch crossed the river on



**CAMANCHE SCENE, 1885**—Pictured above is a group in front of Andre Charroux's Blacksmith Shop, Camanche: Left to right, bottom row, man from Hill Ranch, Andre (Grandpa) Charroux, Adolph Fessier, Henry B. Cavagnaro, Frank Delucchi, Frank Neil, Louis Charroux, Henry A. Cavagnaro, Arthur Fox; back row, John Whiteman, Louis Montenilla, "Landy" Ashton, Gene Zimmermann, Tom Bacigalupi, Adrique Charroux; boy at left, Jack Denevi.

a suspended flume to Lancha Plana, and another extended to Cat Camp between Camanche and Wallace. Then it crossed Bear Creek to Mike's Gulch in San Joaquin County. One end of the ditch is at Sugar Loaf just above Camanche. The supply of water came from a dam in the Mokelumne River. According to Captain Messenger of Campo Seco this ditch gave the settlers the first idea of supplying water to the San Joaquin Valley. Later this developed into the huge water system that supplies most of the East Bay counties.

By 1859 rich placers were being worked at Camanche and the Sand Hill yielded \$1,100 in five days with four men working. Much of the mining was done by hand digging and sluices and later by hydraulicing. Most of the surrounding country has been worked over time and again. Much of the early mining was done by the Chinese. Later, in the 1900's, dredging became the method used. Several large companies worked along the Mokelumne River, such as the Camanche Gold Dredging Company and the Gold Hill Dredging Company.

The Camanche Placers dredged along the creek to the back of town. Various smaller companies have worked the area with dredgers, "doodle bugs", shovels, etc. The most recent mining activity is the development of a plant for silica mining on the Genochio property by a subsidiary of the Pacific Clay Products Co., of Stockton and Los Angeles.

The first schools were private. A Mrs. Jennings had one of the first. This was attended by Mary Duffy. Another private teacher was a Mrs. Hatton, an English teacher, whose school was near the store. A Mr. J. H. Wheelie was the first public school teacher who taught in the building where the present school now stands in 1862. The present school was built in the seventies at the time of the fire that swept over the town. At one time 80 pupils attended the Camanche School under Mr. Chalaner, a graduate of the San Jose Teacher's College. Miss Coaty taught here in 1895 and later a Mr. Day came from Lancha Plana to teach.

The Catholic Church is the only established church in Camanche. Interesting tales are told of its transfer from

Campo Seco. When the population of Campo Seco dwindled the church was to be transferred to Camanche. A wind-storm blew the church down and only the bell was moved and used in the new church in Camanche. This was in 1887. The lumber of the fallen church was bought by Mrs. Goodall and used by her in a house built in Chili Camp.

The building belonging to Mrs. Theresa Cavagnaro was built in 1861 by a Mrs. Littino who used it as a dry goods store. Later Mr. Doherty ran it as a shoe store.

The present store was run by Mr. Dominic Cavagnaro and a Mr. Sanguenetti. They ran it jointly for a while and then disagreed and partitioned it off and each had a store in the building. Henry B. Cavagnaro and John Cavagnaro later ran the store until about 1911. Then they sold out to Mr. Frank Genochio who kept it for 43 years.

A butcher shop once stood where the old recently torn-down barber shop was. It was run by Maime Whitman's half-brother, Charles Walters, who later moved to San Andreas where he had a butcher shop for many years. Martin Duffy was in partnership with him. At another time a Mr. Goyette ran the butcher shop.

Three homes have stood where the Ed Morrrows now live. The first was built by D. Cavagnaro. Next, Mr. Jim Tiscornia built a home there which he later moved to San Andreas—picket fence and all. The present home was built by John Cavagnaro.

The Podesta home, the former Hill place, was built by a Mr. Watt from hand-hewn stone taken from a rock quarry near Camanche. A plant for making insect powder which was called "buhach" was quite an established business there in the early days. The Hills were prominent early citizens. Irving Hill, a college graduate, lived there for many years. Judge Smith said his father lived at the Hill Ranch and at Poverty Bar.

Other early-day families were the Kaisers, the Whites, the Walters, the Mulgrews, the Foxes, and the Morrrows. San Andreas residents who once lived in Camanche are George Stewart, Louis Joses, and Chester Tiscornia.

The early Post Office was in the Zimmerman store and the earliest postmaster was a William Van Gorder, appointed January 18, 1861. Nicholas Zimmerman was appointed October 9, 1863.

The community was served in early days by Dr. Erastus Nelson Foote whose family lived in Clements. After graduating from Vermont Medical College in 1845, he located in Camanche. Some of his fees were strings of wampum from the Indians. He treasured a cane whose hollow interior contained medicine vials. Later, a lady doctor, Dr. Hall, came from Valley Springs. In this generation Dr. March from Burson was the family physician.

In the late seventies and early eighties Italian emigrants came into the area and established truck gardens—the upper and lower gardens—along the creek. Produce from here was "peddled" weekly in wagons over a large part of the county—to San Andreas, and to Milton, and to Ione.

Along the river, on the Amador side, ranches and fruit raising developed. Some of the old-time prominent families there were the Northrups, the Van Zants, the Kientz, the Lucases, the Gooddings, the Fosters, and the Diebalt.

## 'BUHACH' IN CALAVERAS COUNTY

By JUDGE J. A. SMITH

About the late seventies "buhach" was commercially produced on the Hill Ranch, near Camanche, Calaveras County.

On January 1, 1877, Mrs. E. A. Hill (a widow) owner of the Hill Ranch entered into a contract with one G. N. Milco to cultivate in partnership a plant known as "Milco's Universal Insect Exterminator."

By the terms of this agreement Milco was to furnish the seed, one-half the labor of cultivating and harvesting the crop, and Mrs. Hill was to furnish a portion of the river bottom land on her ranch on the south side of the Mokelumne River for growing the plants. She was also to furnish one-half of the labor. The crop was to be equally divided. From the plants grown on the Hill property an insect powder was made known as "Buhach."

The plants were grown in rows, about three feet each way and cultivated both ways in the rows. Additional plants were secured by dividing the old plants and they were grown without irrigation.

The plants reached a height of about 18 inches with a white flower and yellow center on each stem. The flower was about one inch in diameter, and when the field was in full bloom it gave the appearance of a snow field.

Harvesting was done by cutting the tops off with a sickle. The heads were then pulled through a frame to separate them from the stems. They were then dried either in the sunlight or by artificial heat. Later, a part of the stem was also used for powder. The flowers and stems were ground to a fine powder in a burr mill. The powder was placed in barrels, taken to Sacramento, and there placed in small cans and offered to the public as insect powder.

The botanical name of the plant is *Chrysanthemum Turreanum* or *Cinerariefolium*.

After the termination of the partnership, Mrs. Hill continued for many years to conduct the business. At first she had a small mill located near the home. This plant was operated by steam power. Later a larger mill was built about 500 yards north of the house, which was also operated by steam power. This mill was replaced by one operated by water power. The water came from the Mokelumne River through a one and one-half mile ditch. The mill was located about one-half mile north of the mill home.

As much as 80 acres were devoted to the crop and during the harvesting season about 100 persons were employed, a great many of them being Indians and Chinese. Some of the Chinese lived on the Hill Ranch the year around while others came for the harvesting season only. A large Chinese population lived at Camanche at this time. During school vacation, boys could always secure work on the place.

A man named Burroughs was the mill man and John L. Snyder (Mish) was the foreman. Mrs. Hill also kept strict personal supervision over all the work. Mrs. Hill had been left a widow many years before, and after her husband's death, she operated the ranch. She was affectionately called "Auntie Hill" by the residents of Camanche. She had one son named Irving Hill, who always lived on the ranch.

May we extend our congratulations to Miss Elizabeth Kaler of Murphys and Mrs. Ruby Taylor of Rail Road Flat, who were elected to the Board of Directors at the annual election in July.



## OFFICERS OF CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

San Andreas, California

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The Calaveras County Historical Society meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at the Courthouse in San Andreas. Dinner meetings are held each quarter at different places in the county.

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### EDITORIAL

Dr. Aubrey Neasham, State Historian, has encouraged the Society to send in fifty words suitable as an inscription on a bronze plaque to be erected at Camanche. The State will provide the bronze plaque, but the monument must be raised by local effort. Judge J. A. Smith has appointed a committee consisting of Frank Genochio, Archie Stevenot, and Coke Wood to work out plans for the monument. Frank Genochio reported at the last meeting of the Society that plans have been made to erect the monument largely with donated labor and supplies. Actual construction is being delayed until the State Division of Beaches and Parks has approved the project.

Proposals were made at the September meeting of the Society to work out some activities that would interest the students of the county in local history. It was proposed that either a writing contest or a speaking contest be organized in the schools of the county on local history and that the winners not only be given prizes but membership in the Society. In this manner the teachers and the pupils would be stimulated to do research and study in county history. Ed Leonard was appointed by Judge Smith as chairman of a committee to work out details of the plans and present them to the Society at the October meeting.

Your editor, immodestly but happily, announces that the first general history of Calaveras County, "Calaveras, the Land of Skulls," is being distributed by the Mother Lode Press of Sonora. The price is five dollars, plus tax, and postage to all except members of the Calaveras County Historical Society, who are given a twenty per cent discount, making the cost four dollars to them. Orders may be mailed to the Mother Lode Press, Sonora, or to Coke

## FIRE IN CAMANCHE

The greatest fire ever known in Camanche occurred on Friday night, June 21, 1873. Between the hours of 9 and 10 the citizens were aroused by an alarm of fire in the part of town occupied by the Chinese populace. All attempts to arrest the flames were futile and such was the rapidity with which the fire spread that the destruction of the whole town seemed inevitable.

With all possible haste the contents of dwelling houses were removed to places of security and the outskirts of the town presented a strange sight. Not until the fire had reached the fireproof buildings in the lower part of town did there appear a possibility of fighting it with success. All the water that could be brought to use upon the flames had to be drawn from wells 90 to 100 feet in depth. But the citizens threw themselves into the work with the energy of despair and finally succeeded in arresting the progress. Not, however, until some 30 houses had been burned together with their contents, little being saved. The fireproof buildings stood the fire well. It is estimated the loss will amount to \$15,000, or more.—Calaveras Chronicle, June 28, 1873.

## CAMANCHE

(Stockton Record, September 29, 1937)

This mining settlement, whose name is believed to be of obscure Indian origin, is located on the south bank of the Mokelumne River in the western end of Calaveras County.

As in the case of so many gold towns hastily constructed of wood, Camanche was destroyed by fire early in its existence. More substantial dwellings and stores were erected in the sixties. Typical of these were the Henry A. Cavagnaro Building, which bears a plate showing it was built in 1860, and the Duffy Hotel, built in 1867.

Two miles north of Camanche once stood a genuine ghost town. Poverty Bar, which in its brief but tragic experience made colorful history in California. When the Mokelumne River washed away much of the ground on which the town was located, its inhabitants deserted the location or moved to Camanche.

From mining to manufacture of insect powder was the transition made in Camanche in the later years. Most of the activity in field of insect powder was around Camanche. The principal mining regions were at Cat Camp, Sand Hill, and Crow Point. Like most forty-niners, the settlers at Camanche, enjoyed horse racing and the main street was used as a race track.

Wood, Murphys. Favorable reviews have been given the book by the local newspapers, the Stockton Record, the Mother Lode Magazine, and Bay Area newspapers. Radio reviews have been given by Elsie Flower over KGDM, Stockton, and by Henry Schatt over KNBC, San Francisco. As this is a limited edition and the books are selling rapidly, it is hoped no one will delay too long in getting his copy.

Mrs. Frank Genochio and Miss Madeline Cavagnaro are to be congratulated on the excellent paper on Camanche which they prepared and read at the September meeting of the Society. The meeting was enthusiastically enjoyed by a fairly large attendance.

—C. W.