



Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society
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HISTORIC EVENTS OF MOKELUMNE HILL

By EMMETT P. JOY

Dedicatory Speaker, June 14, 1959

Elevation 1474 feet. First explored by Spaniards. Traversed by French trappers before the gold discovery in California.

Established as a trading center for miners in the fall of 1848. Named for an Indian tribe that lived here. Rich gravel channels and quartz mines made a veritable gold mountain which produced fortunes in quick succession for several years. The town was said to be one of the liveliest places in the mining region of California. During the height of the gold excitement it was also said that it was an aspirant for the State Capitol.

Colonel Jonathan D. Stevenson and some of his former soldiers of the so-called "Stevenson's Regiment" resumed civil life after the Mexican War and were among the first to mine in this locality. Among the first settlers were the Fourcade Brothers, whose name remained attached to the town for some time. The French called the place "Les Fourcades."

The most popular amusement, in the early days of the gold rush, was the bull and bear fights. In 1849 prisoners were taken here for trial during the Chilean War of Calaveras. The French War occurred on French Hill in 1851.

A company of militia called "The Calaveras Guards" was organized in 1851. Post Office established July 1851. Vigilante committee formed 1851-52. County Seat located in 1852-1866. Mokelumne Hill canal completed in 1853. Adams Express Company erected building in 1854. In 1861 the I. O. O. F. Lodge added the third story, thus making it the first three-story building in the county. Gas lights illuminated the streets in 1857. Fire Department organized in 1862. Conflagrations destroyed the town in 1854-65-74. Visited by floods in the winter of 1861-62. First school taught



DEDICATED AS LANDMARK—Dedicated last month was the Leger Hotel, above, part of which was once used as Calaveras County Court House.

in a tent used by the Methodist Church for services. It was taught by the wife of Reverend J. B. Fish in 1852. Permanent schools subsequently built. School district established June, 1859.

Congregational Church organized 1853. Oldest Congregational church building in California built in 1856 still remains.

Methodist Episcopal Church established 1851, permanent building erected in 1854. Building no longer stands.

Catholic Church erected 1851, burned in the fire of 1854, another erected on Church Hill which also burned in 1874.

The present church erected in the seventies near the site of the original church.

Some of the early lodges were Mokelumne Lodge No. 31, F. & A. M., May, 1853; Mokelumne Lodge No. 44, I. O. O. F., October, 1855; Alta Parlor, N. S. G. W. No. 46, November, 1884.

The town once claimed a Chilean Hospital and a French Mutual Relief Society. It was one of the largest Chilean and French settlements in the state. Also a large Irish population in 1851. Chinatown, on the east end of Center Street, is now gone.

Electric lights were turned on for the first time in August, 1897, when the Leger Hotel was illuminated. Part of this building was erected and served as the Court House of Calaveras County from 1852-1866. George W. Leger, owner of the adjoining hotel, secured the court house building and the upper floor was converted into hotel rooms. The court house became a part of the Leger Hotel, which was erected prior to 1852.

Some of the historic buildings still to be seen are the original court house, Leger Hotel, Congregational Church, the three-story I. O. O. F. Building, and other stone buildings on Center Street erected about 1854. On upper Main Street is the old bakery oven built in the early days.

E. Clampus Vitus was established in Mokelumne Hill by Joel Zumwalt in 1851.

REMARKS AT THE MOKELUMNE HILL DEDICATION

June 14, 1959

By JUDGE J. A. SMITH

(Read by Vice President Paul Lewis)

Mokelumne Hill is a part of Calaveras County rich in history, tradition, and romance, and today we are assembled in this old Mother Lode community to dedicate two old buildings as a historic monument in the County, the old Calaveras Court House and the Leger Hotel.

It was the fur traders who were the first whites to break the pathway and blaze the trails that were later followed by the greatest migration in the world, the covered wagon parade, those people who journeyed westward to the gold fields and this land of hope, reward, success, and failure.

From the four corners of the earth they flooded to California, the rich and the poor, people of every profession and occupation. This was the land of the golden fleece, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, the land where dreams sometimes come true.

Never again will there be such a migration as to the California gold fields.

Nature was kind to the early pioneers if they were able to cross the height of the Sierra. Here was a land where a man could labor 365 days in the year. Water and wood was in abundance. Forests to make shelter were plentiful. Wild game abounded and the climate was temperate.

This was the Mokelumne Hill to which some of our pioneers came.

Undoubtedly, Happy Valley was the first settlement in this community. The early trappers established a post here long before gold was discovered. They worked out of French



Shown here is Mr. Emmett Joy of San Francisco and Mokelumne Hill delivering the dedicatory address at the unveiling of the historic plaque on the old Calaveras County Court House and Leger Hotel in Mokelumne Hill on June 14. Seated behind him are Alex Lombardi of Mokelumne Hill, old timer, and Dr. Aubrey Neasham, State Historian, who participated in the ceremonies.

Camp near Stockton.

Mokelumne Hill soon became the leading town of Calaveras County.

Mokelumne Hill had a large cosmopolitan population. The French, Germans, Chinese, Jews, Mexicans and Americans settled here in large numbers. Here was established the first code of laws for the mines, the basis for the later mining laws of California. Here was established the first weekly newspaper in California, the Calaveras Chronicle, the first issue being dated October 18, 1851. At one time from its office a newspaper printed in German was issued.

Here was the first three-story building in the interior of California. Here was established the first Protestant Church that still exists in California.

The first discovery of gold in Calaveras County was on the Mokelumne River not far from where we now stand. This river was first extensively mined in 1848. The first trading post at Mokelumne Hill was kept by a Mr. Syree and G. B. Dickinson kept the first boarding house.

In 1852 Mokelumne Hill was made the County Seat of Calaveras County. At that time it was probably the liveliest place in the mines. Death by violence seemed to be the rule.

According to Dr. Soher, an old time resident of Mokelumne Hill, for seventeen successive weeks a man was killed between Saturday and Sunday mornings. Five men were once killed in one week and on one occasion five men were legally executed on one day.

At one time Mokelumne Hill organized a vigilance committee that had a short existence.

Here was the scene of the French War and the so-called Chilean War.

Here was assembled a legal bar as famous as any in the State.

Here was the home of Judge James H. Hardy, probably the only Judge in California impeached and removed from office. He was the judge of the 10th Judicial District, composed of Amador, Calaveras and Mono counties. He was charged with disloyalty during the Civil War and removed

from office. Singularly the only other judge in California tried for high crimes was named Hardy. He was acquitted.

In 1866 the County Seat was moved to San Andreas. The old building used by the County as a Court House became a part of the Leger Hotel.

GEORGE W. LEGER

This man, who gave his name to the famous hotel, was a native of Hesse Cassell, Germany, came to Mokelumne Hill in 1851 and for 28 years was one of the steadfast and staunch promoters of the best interests of the community. Misfortunes that would have overwhelmed the ordinary man were withstood by him. He was possessed of a steady courage and energy that not only surmounted all difficulties, but gave encouragement and support to those of a weaker faith.

He was a director of the French Mutual Society of Mokelumne Hill, that maintained a hospital for sick and disabled members. For years he was chief of the fire department.

It was as a caterer and hotel man that he was noted and outstanding. His hotel was known throughout California as one of California's famous hotels. Sunday dinners were a specialty at the Leger Hotel and people came for miles around to partake of these dinners.

He passed away on March 13, 1879, and was buried by the Odd Fellows at Mokelumne Hill.

Today Mokelumne Hill is surrounded by memories. Here still stands the old town that has been ravished and destroyed by fire several times.

The Mokelumne River still flows below the town and the old canal still brings water to the community.

Here still stands French Hill, Nigger Hill, Steep Gulch, Buckeye, Happy Valley, Stockton Hill, Chili Gulch, Corral Flat, each proclaiming the vast amount of gold it has contributed to the world.

It was here that many of you were born and you passed the happy hours of childhood. It was here that your forefathers built this community and now sleep forever in its cemeteries. The same sky bends over you.

Most of the buildings you knew so well have fallen victims to fire or decay. The same streets are here, but they no longer resound to the sounds of industries that are long gone.

However, hope springs eternal in the human breast, and while we pause today to dedicate these historical monuments of days that are past, our affections for the old town shall continue to abide forever, and may what we do here today be a perpetual monument to the fact that we are not unmindful of those old pioneers who gave a part of their lives to make our lives what they are today.

MURDERED FOR BULLION

By **EDNA BRYAN BUCKBEE** in *Stockton Record*, 1935

Kinney Said, while carrying bullion from the Petticoat Mine near West Point, of which he was superintendent, when nearing Mokelumne Hill, was murdered by Mexican bandits for the treasure in his possession. Ben Thorn, Sheriff of Calaveras County, hunted down the guilty ones, one of whom was executed on the gallows in the jail yard in San Andreas.

MOKELUMNE HILL

From a *Biographical History of Calaveras County*,
Written by **Mr. Huffman**, Published by the **Lewis
Publishing Co. of Chicago** in 1892

(Read by Supervisor **William Wells** at the Dedication
on **June 14, 1959**)

One of the most attractive and the best watered towns in the County is Mokelumne Hill, which occupies a favorable location at an elevation of 1,350 feet above sea level.

This was one of the first gold mining camps in the Sierra Nevada gold fields, Rich Gulch, at this place, having been discovered by some soldiers of Stevenson's Regiment in the fall of 1848, and in times past it was one of the most important places in the State, with a busy, rich and prosperous population of some 5,000 souls. Scattered all over California and indeed as far away as the Atlantic Coast, are scores of men who obtained their first start at Mokelumne Hill, for the placers here were of the richest, and held out for years.

When this town was the county seat of Calaveras County, its bar was one of the most brilliant on the coast, and many of the brightest minds of California congregated here, but the old glory of Mokelumne Hill has departed and now it is a place of but 600 or 700 inhabitants. Instead, however, of the rushing mining camp of former days, it is a beautiful little city of residences surrounded by fruits and flowers, while on the hills about the place are flourishing orchards and vineyards. Oranges are grown in many of the yards and do finely; a branch containing a cluster of forty oranges exhibited in 1886, at the State Citrus Fair, Sacramento, carried off the first prize as the best cluster.

There are a number of large gravel mines about the town, and quartz mining is also receiving attention, as it is known that there are yet millions in gold remaining in the hills.

The Mokelumne Hill Chronicle is the oldest newspaper in the State, having been in continuous existence since 1851. While its field is now necessarily limited on account of the comparatively small population which it can profitably reach, it has a splendid history, and has been one of the most influential journals in the State.

One of the scraps of the early gold mining history of California is to the effect that a Frenchman fishing for frogs for his breakfast in a prospect hole at Mokelumne Hill one day in November, 1848, discovered a speck of gold, and dug out with his pocket knife a nugget which he sold for \$2,150.00.

THOMAS R. SMITH

By **EDNA BRYAN BUCKBEE** in *Stockton Record*, 1935

Thomas R. Smith came to Calaveras County in 1858 and located at Camanche, and a short time later moved onward to Lancha Plana and Poverty Bar. Next he went to Latterville on the North Branch of the Calaveras River, also at Chilian Gulch. When the Frazier River boom was on, he went up there, and later went to the White Pines mines in the Nevada Territory. The party of which he was a member on the Nevada expedition was driven from these mines by hostile Indians, ranging the land east of the

(Continued on Page 4)

OFFICERS OF CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

San Andreas, California

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Sadie Hunt, Secretary Valley Springs
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Editor of Las Calaveras Coke Wood, Murphys

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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.

EDITORIAL

Congratulations to Mrs. Hattie Hertzig and the Essay Contest Committee on the completion of another successful contest in local history which was held for the third time this year. First prize in the high school division went to Joy Young, a sophomore at Calaveras High School. In the elementary division, Helen Ellingwood, a seventh grader at San Andreas, won first prize; Patty Braner, also a seventh grader at San Andreas, won second prize, and third prize went to Dana Bee Ponte, an eighth grader at San Andreas. Besides cash prizes of \$15.00, \$10.00 and \$5.00, the winners received membership cards to the Calaveras County Historical Society and a free dinner. This is a nice inducement to students, but without the cooperation of the English and social studies teachers and the encouragement of the parents, few youngsters will make the effort to do the necessary original research to write a winning essay. Let's hope we can again obtain their support next year for the fourth annual contest.

Congratulations to Victor Gretzinger and to the Mokelumne Lions Club and the people of Mokelumne Hill for organizing an excellent dedicatory program for the dedication of the historic plaque on the old court house and the Leger Hotel. Emmett Joy gave an interesting talk as the dedicatory speaker. The only thing lacking in a fine occasion was the absence of our beloved president due to illness. His excellent speech was capably read by Vice President Paul Lewis in his absence. This was one of the few dedications that Judge Smith has missed.

Congratulations to our dear friends and charter members of the Society, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Schwoerer, on the observance of their golden wedding anniversary in June. May they have many more years of happiness together.

The members of the Society might like to know that

Dr. Rockwell D. Hunt, "Mr. California" and an honorary member of our society, has recovered sufficiently from his bout with pneumonia to be moved from the hospital at Oakdale to the Hillhaven Rest Home, 1630 N. Edison Street, Stockton. This is a real victory for a man approaching ninety-two. I'm sure we all wish him continued improvement.

Covert Martin ably represented the Society at the very excellent Fifth Annual Meeting of the Conference of California Historical Societies in San Mateo in June. The new president of the Conference is Dr. Frank M. Stranger of the San Mateo Historical Association, and the vice president will be L. Burr Belden of the San Bernardino Historical Society. Your editor of Las Calaveras was retained as executive secretary. Mrs. Matilda Sheatsley of Sonora was reelected Regional Vice President for the Mother Lode. The next annual meeting of the Conference will be at Bakersfield, June 24-26, 1960.

POSTMASTERS AT MOKELUMNE HILL

By PAUL LEWIS

1. James B. McKimis, July 10, 1851
2. Albert W. Goodwin, November 25, 1853
3. Henry A. Anhiser, July 3, 1855
4. Lewis M. Hellman, May 19, 1857
5. Sylvester C. Florence, February 8, 1859
6. Lewis M. Hellman, June 7, 1859
7. George Klaber, March 26, 1860
8. Hosea M. Couch, December 9, 1861
9. Max M. Hellman, August 23, 1865
10. William Innes, February 6, 1866
11. William P. Peek, October 2, 1876
12. Thomas Peters, April 27, 1886
13. Samuel L. Davidson, August 24, 1887
14. William Wells, December 24, 1888
15. Charles M. Burleson, March 2, 1892
16. Samuel L. Davidson, May 25, 1894
17. Charles U. Werle, December 12, 1894
18. Raphael Wise, December 22, 1898
19. Frank W. Peek, January 31, 1899
20. Percy S. Peek, January 10, 1912
21. Mrs. Flora Dahl, August 31, 1926—Deceased February 6, 1946
22. Ivy A. Dahl—Acting P. M. February 8, 1946—Appointed July 2, 1946

(Continued From Page 3)

Sierra. Eventually West Point became Thomas Smith's home. His brother, John R. Smith, in 1852 was blacksmithing in Angels Camp.

Thomas Smith's son, J. A. Smith, born in West Point, is the Superior Judge of Calaveras County.

MARRIED

(From Calaveras Chronicle, August 29, 1853)

Keong Ashing, of Hong Kong, to Miss Ahew, of Tit Sing, Empire of China. Ceremony was performed by Hon. Henry Eno at Mokelumne Hill.

This was the first marriage celebrated in California between celestials.