

THE HISTORY OF BOARD'S CROSSING

By
Sharon Karr

The cry of "Gold!" echoing from far-off California in 1849 inspired William Board, of Calloway County, Missouri, to seek his fortune in the gold fields. Young and adventurous, William, at age 26, traveled overland with the growing horde of hopeful emigrants, to arrive in what soon was to become Calaveras County. He quickly found employment as a drayman for a mining operation and with hard labor and industriousness, in little more than three years managed to save enough money to return to Missouri.

William's hope as he arrived back in Calloway County via the Isthmus of Panama, was to encourage family members to return West with him. Although single, he had 12 brothers and sisters whom he hoped to interest in the trip. The father of his clan was a farmer who had married four or five times, divorcing one wife and losing

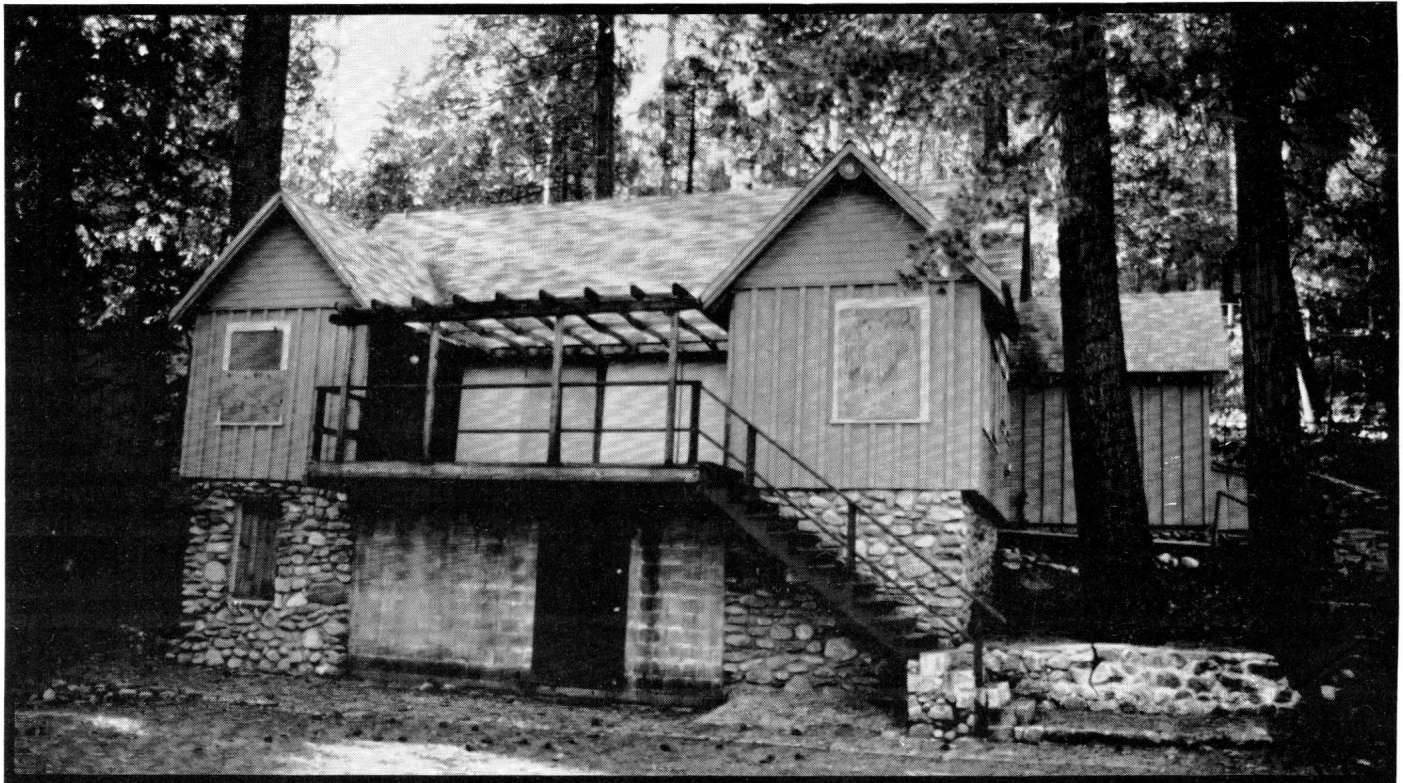


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the others to childbirth or disease.

From his 12 siblings William found one convert. His older half-brother David Board, with his wife and children, showed interest in undertaking the rigorous journey. With preparations completed, they started overland in the Spring of 1854. In addition to William and David, the family group included David's wife, Mary Martin Board, seven children, one black slave and a herd of 100 cattle.

David Board, 35 years old that summer of 1854, had married Mary Martin, from Kentucky, in 1841. Of
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The Nicol Smith home at Board's Crossing has provided a half-century of gracious living.

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eight children born to them, all had survived except a daughter who died in infancy. Their children included Lydia, 11, followed by Philip, John, Robert, William, Mary and 18-month-old Enoch. When Mary's father learned of her impending trip to California he presented her with a male slave to help her during the journey. Mary and her husband agreed the slave would become a free man when the trip across the continent was completed. However, before reaching California the black man drank bad water and died.

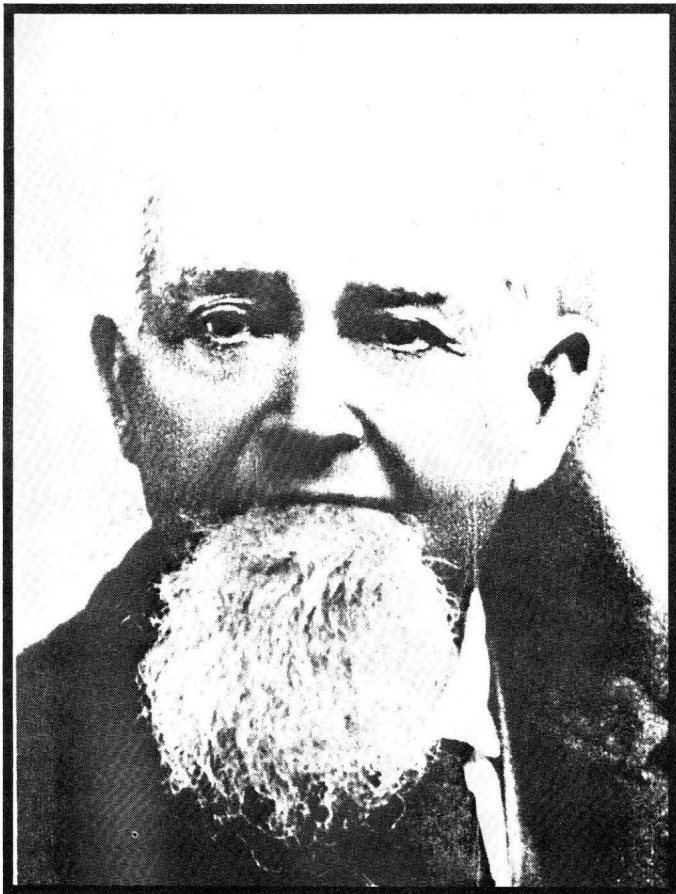
Arriving in California, the Boards settled in San Joaquin County where David began farming grain and William, after marrying in 1855, moved to Sonoma County to raise cattle. During the next years Mary gave birth to two more children, Lawson and Rufus. During 1858 or early 1859 the family may have lived in Calaveras County where their eleventh child, James Milton, was born in January, 1859. However, tragedy struck the family in November of that year when after moving

to Bachelor Valley in Stanislaus County, Lawson and Rufus, aged five and two, died of typhoid fever.

The family settled down and remained in Stanislaus County from 1859 until 1870. David raised grain while Mary raised her brood of children. Four more youngsters, Ella, Martha, David Jr. and Horace were added to the family during those years. Ella passed away while still a youngster and Lydia, the eldest, by then 17, married William Snow, of Stockton.

The Boards made one last move about 1870 to Salt Spring Valley, Calaveras County. David, Mary and eight children settled on the new ranch. Two of the older sons, John and Robert, did not make the move. David wrote to his father in Missouri in March, 1875, to update him on conditions in California.

'...I have no news of importance to *wright* in that times are tolerable good in this country. ...I have sold some of my *grane* ranch in the valley and have bought me a Stock Ranch of 480 acres of land in Salt Spring Valley and am raising stock. I have a good ranch in the



David Board



Mary Martin Board

mountains. I have not heard from Wills for about 2 months they were all well then. Crops are looking *verry* well in this country up to this time but we have not had any rain for the last two months. The crops are beginning to need rain *verry* much at this time and if we don't have any more rain this spring crops will be *verry* light ..."

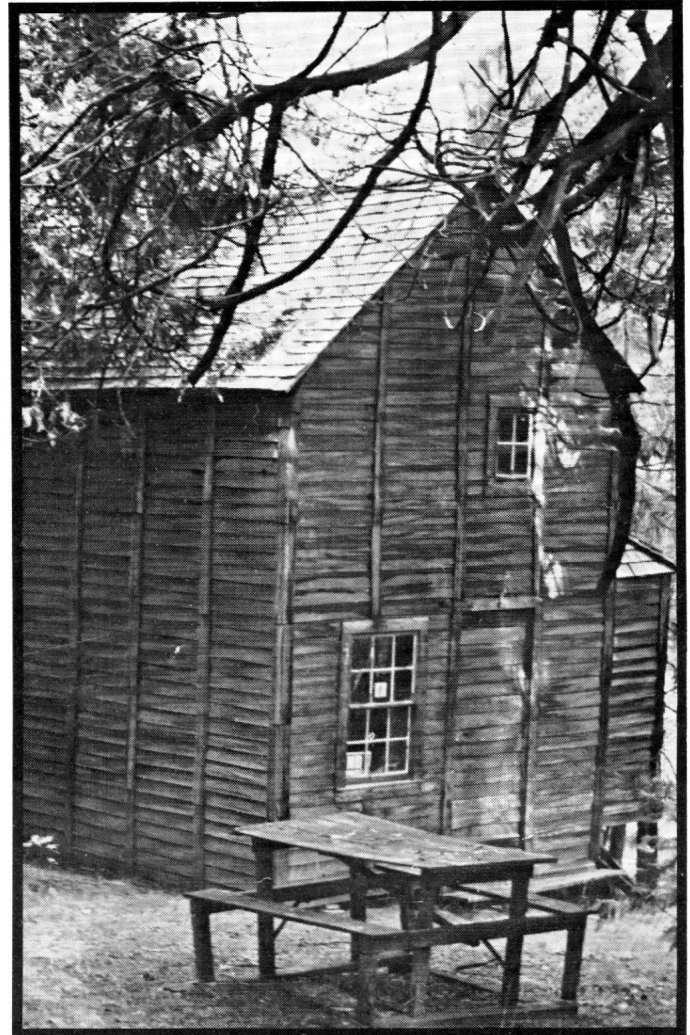
The switch from grain to cattle ranching brought a sharp change to the Board family's way of life. David quickly learned that the most satisfactory manner in which to handle a cattle operation was to graze his herd in the mountains during summer. In Salt Spring Valley he met a Mr. Crawford who had come to California in 1859 and for several years made a living splitting shakes near Calaveras Big Trees. It was through Crawford that David Board found a suitable high country cattle range just beyond Big Trees and east of Dorrington. There along the North Fork of the Stanislaus River lay lush meadows and prime summer grazing land. A shallow, accessible crossing for fording the river with the cattle added to its desirability. In addition to providing prime summer feed, the meadow made ideal holding areas for his cattle during the Fall round-up.

Adopting this river country for their permanent summer cattle range, the Boards during the early 1870's built a cabin on 160 acres there. The cabin was constructed entirely of hand-hewn beams, timbers and shakes. Doors swung on leather hinges and a stone fireplace provided warmth and cooking facilities.

The 1870's also brought marriage and death to the family. Their daughter, Mary, married Crawford's son, Eugene, in October, 1874. Enoch died in December of that same year and then, Mary, the new bride, followed him in August of 1875, dying in childbirth after being married a brief 10 months.

Next to marry was the eldest son, Philip. He married Susan Mitchell in November, 1875. The following year John married and in 1881 Robert also wed. Those two sons married sisters, Ida and Harriet Jameson, of Dixon. They located near Visalia, in Tulare County. The four youngest Board children, James, Martha, David Jr., and Horace continued to live at home with their parents.

David Jr. was primarily responsible for staying with the cattle during the summer at what already was becoming well known as Board's Crossing. He left Salt Spring Valley each spring with the herd, knowing it was imperative he reach the mountains and the river crossing before melting snow in the high country raised the stream's level and made it difficult for cattle to ford. His reading material during those summer months in the



Board's Crossing cabin has weathered 120 years.

mountains was a bible provided by his mother.

With the help of his brothers, David Jr. would put the Board cattle across the river, utilizing the shallow crossing. The crossing also came to be used by other cattle men who grazed their animals in Tuolumne County and since the crossing was on their homestead, the Board's may have charged the other livestock owners for its use.

Young Martha Board married Byron Beckwith in 1887, leaving the three sons and their parents to run the ranch in Salt Spring Valley and the mountain property. Mary busied herself with the care of the remaining family. Philip by then, was married and had four daughters, but his wife was institutionalized in Stockton with mental illness. He lived on the ranch so his mother could help him with his children.

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In addition to raising her large family, Mary Board for several years served as Salt Spring Valley school trustee. Then suddenly, in 1895, she passed away at age 72. She had been married for 53 years and left behind her husband, seven sons, two daughters, myriad grandchildren and a legacy of strength and determination.

Three years later, in April, 1898, David Board died, leaving his ranch properties to his eight remaining children. James, David Jr. and Horace continued to run the ranch. The other four boys and one sister sold their interests to the three boys later that year. Although Philip has sold his interest in the ranch he continued to live on it and work with his brothers.

Turn of the century found the interests of James, David Jr. and Horace, diverging. David Jr. purchased a quartz milling operation and in 1904, at age 39, married Marien Walsh, of Stockton. Then, in October, 1906, the three brothers sold the Board's Crossing property to Frank Nicol and W.G. Wallace, of Stockton, for \$2,000. Shortly thereafter, the Boards abandoned ranching to enter the mining business. Together, they owned the Midwinter and Evening Star Gold Mines. The first of those was sold in 1909 and the 1910 census showed that Philip Board was the only member of the family remaining in Calaveras County.

Philip lived for a time at the neighboring Tower Ranch, working as a hired hand and a stock raiser. David Jr. and Horace had moved to Linden where they opened a butcher shop called Board Bros. Linden Meat Market. James already had moved to Stockton and married, following the sale of the family ranch. Philip moved to Stockton late in 1910 where he began raising mules. He was killed shortly thereafter when one of his animals kicked him in the head.

The year of 1915 marked the last sale in Calaveras County of property owned by the Board brothers. They sold the Evening Star quartz mine to John K. Prattle, of Stockton. David Jr. and Horace Board left the butcher business and moved to Humboldt County where they lived out the remainder of their years. ²

But, the history of Board's Crossing has continued to wax colorful over the years and into this century. Purchase of the land on the Stanislaus River from the Board brothers by the two Stocktonians started its history anew. Frank Nicol was a well known Stockton attorney and Wallace was a doctor. Frank Nicol's family had arrived in Columbia in 1854. Young Frank studied law in Sonora under Caleb Dorsey and served as a state assemblyman in 1882.³

Nicol and Wallace began bringing camping expedi-



The original cattle ford at Board's Crossing.

tions of friends from Stockton to the mountain retreat. In 1910 Frank died after a battle with Grave's disease, leaving the river property to his wife Adelaide ⁴ Shortly after her husband's death she moved to San Francisco to be near her children. Her daughter, Susan Nicol Smith and her husband, R.H. Smith, lived at the Fairmont Hotel with their only child, Nicol Smith, then only a few months old.

Later, needing money to support herself and her mother, Nana Dodge⁵ Adelaide sold the Board's Crossing land to her son-in-law, Smith. He sometimes traveled from San Francisco to the river to fish, staying in Board's old cabin. Dr. Wallace's share in the property had been purchased earlier by Adelaide Nicol at the cost of \$1,000.

But, others also were interested in the land along the North Fork of the Stanislaus at Board's Crossing. As a young man, Louis Wetmore, of Stockton, had camped and fished there with groups brought in by Frank Nicol and Dr. Wallace. He had always dreamed of returning and in 1935 he not only returned, but managed to locate R.H. Smith and his wife in Burlingame. From them, Wetmore purchased the 80 acres on the Tuolumne County side of the river on which the Board's cabin and meadow were located.

The area actually remained little changed from when Wetmore had last seen it, except that a bridge now spanned the river near the cabin. An automobile road replaced the trail, over which visitors in earlier years



Bridge now replaces cattle ford at Board's Crossing.

had been forced to hike from Dorrington to reach the river area. Wetmore immediately began construction of a cabin on his newly acquired river property, which he christened Cresta Pinal. He also started restoration of the Board cabin. Louis Wetmore has passed away, but the land is still owned and used by his family.

But, the years had not been kinds to R.H. Smith. Worth millions during the 1920's, a series of dry oil wells and poor land investments led him to financial disaster.

In 1936 the bank foreclosed on his remaining 80 acres on the Calaveras County side of the Stanislaus River. However, three years later, in 1939, Smith's son, Nicol, newly married to the former Moira Archbold, granddaughter of John Dana Archbold, co-founder of the Standard Oil Company, returned from a trip to the Orient. He was able to buy back from the bank all the land on the north side of the river.

Art Hall, Nicol Smith's friend and associate, immediately began construction of a house on that property. Early 1940 found the home completed and Smith used it as a retreat where he could work undisturbed on his travel books and lectures. He and Moira also entertained there. Moira's mother, Anne Archbold, was among their guests and at her insistence the Smith's purchased from the Calaveras Land and Timber Company, additional acreage across the river from their home, to preserve the view.

Art Hall built a home there on the river for his family, then built a second house for Nicol and Moira. Later, a third home known as Tree House, was added.

For many years Nicol employed a gourmet cook, Millie Pusich, of Angels Camp. During the summers the children from the campground would offer their services. Nicol often hired them to sweep walks, rake the sand on the beach and roll out the carts of food and drink at dinner.

In the early sixties a dam project was being planned that would have resulted in putting Board's Crossing under water. During that period Nicol sold several acres upstream to determine the value of his land. The project was canceled and Board's Crossing remains much the same now as it was twenty and thirty years ago. Several new cabins have been built, the Halls lost their main house in a fire. In 1989 the campers had a party commemorating fifty years with Nicol Smith.



Wetmore family cabin at Board's Crossing

Over the years those houses have sheltered such personalities as William Saroyan, Herb Cain, the King of Thailand and countless others from around the world. Nicol Smith has made sure that Board's Crossing remains a place of serene beauty and quiet.

Traditions also have a way of enduring there. One that still endures -- that began some three-quarters of a century ago with Frank Nicol and Dr. Wallace bringing guests to camp along the river -- today remains alive and well. Many families, some of whose grandparents camped and fished with Frank Nicol and Dr. Wallace, still use those same campsites. Nicol Smith has drafted contracts that allow these families to retain the same specific camping spot year after year - passing those

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rights on from generation to generation.

Well preserved, the old Board family's cabin across the river still stands. Not far upstream is the shallow ford where David Board's cattle crossed the river. True, there are a few houses and cabins there now, and during summer the scene along the river may include a few tents or camp trailers. But, by and large, Board's Crossing remains not too much changed from the days when only lonely young cowboys and wandering cattle knew the area.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. *Stanislaus County was created in 1854. It was enlarged from San Joaquin County between 1856-1860. It is possible the Board family did not move as often as stated. Land records have not been located prior to their owning the ranch in Salt Spring Valley, Calaveras County. They may have lived in the vicinity that was subject to the changing boundaries between San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Calaveras Counties. Locations have been referenced based upon birth, marriage and death records.*
2. *The last known visit to Board's Crossing by members of the Board family was around 1942. The granddaughter, Karen, of David Board Jr., picnicked with her brother and parents at Board's Crossing.*
3. *Frank Nicol subsequently ran for office again in 1884 and 1886 in Tuolumne County and lost both elections. He then moved to Stockton in 1888 and practiced law the remainder of his life. His younger brother George Nicol lived in Sonora and was Superior Court Judge of Tuolumne County from 1890 to 1892. George Nicol and his wife, Julia, resided in the Nicol mansion, still standing at Stewart and Gold Streets.*
4. *Adelaide Dodge was born in Jamestown and married Frank Nicol in 1883 in Sonora. The family moved to Stockton in 1888.*
5. *Nana Dodge was Eliza Rodgers Dodge. She had arrives in Jamestown in 1854, 17 years old, after traveling around the Horn to San Francisco. At Jamestown she joined her brother, Edwin A. Rodgers, a lawyer. She married Mark Tyler Dodge, a prominent county physician in 1855 and had two children. She was widowed in 1860 and taught school to support her children.*
6. *Moir's grandfather was John Dana Archbold, co-founder of Standard Oil with John D. Rockefeller.*

CHARTER MEMBERS HONORED AT ANNIVERSARY DINNER

Forty years ago, on October 23, 1952, a group of local citizens, most of them descendants of pioneer families, gathered in the historic Murphys Hotel to become charter members of the Calaveras County Historical Society.

At their meeting of October 22, 1992, present-day society members again met in the Murphys Hotel to pay tribute to the men and women who founded this organization four decades earlier. And, in honoring those charter members, the present-day members reaffirmed the society's dedication to the preservation of local county history.

Current Historical Society President Charles Stone, himself a native son and a member of a pioneer Calaveras County family, said it all with brevity and quiet eloquence as he quoted the late Judge J.A. Smith's draft of the society's Statement of Purpose.

"Located in the center of the gold mining district of California, Calaveras County is rich in history, tradition, romance and lore. The early growth of the State of California to a great extent took place in the gold mining areas and Calaveras County contributed its full share. Many of the persons who became leaders in this state were miners or business leaders in Calaveras County.

It is late to obtain the full particulars of many early events in the history of this county. The pioneers and argonauts are gone. Much material is lost. However, many of the descendants of early residents of the county still are living, and it is possible to collect from them a vast fund of our early history. Although many of the issues of the earliest newspapers are lost, some still remain available in museums and libraries.

The prime purpose of the Calaveras County Historical Society is to collect and preserve for posterity the early history of Calaveras County. It is inevitable that in a work of this magnitude, the execution of which will be in many hands, there will be errors and omissions. However, it will be the constant aim of the Calaveras County Historical Society to discriminate between true and false, to the end that the work of the society will reflect a true account of events and that as much as possible of its history will be preserved."

Unfortunately, time has taken its grim toll. Of 93 members who signed the original charter at the Murphys Hotel 40 years ago, only one person -- Carmenne Poore, of San Andreas, could be present at the 1992 anniversary dinner.

Mrs. Poore, widow of the late George Poore, has been one of the leaders and most staunch supporter of the historical society and its goals. She has, at one time or another, served in every office of the historical society, including that of President. Her husband was also a past president of the society and for a number of years, following his retirement as a rancher and civil engineer, served as curator of the Calaveras County Courthouse Museum.



Charter member Carmenne Poore is congratulated by Society President Charles Stone during the organization's 40th anniversary dinner at the Murphys, Hotel.

The Calaveras County Historical Society was formed in 1952 under the leadership of Dr. Richard "Coke" Wood, Covert Martin and Calaveras County Superior Judge J.A. Smith, with Calaveras Grange No. 715 as its sponsor.

An organizational meeting attended by Coke Wood and a small group of Calaveras citizens was held in the Calaveras High School library, in San Andreas. Wood, Martin and Judge Smith took the lead in setting up the organization and drafting by-laws. A nominating committee was appointed, and on August 19, 1952, the society's first officers were elected.

Judge Smith served as the historical society's first president, Coke Wood, its 1st vice president and Sadie Hunt, secretary. George Poore, John Squellati, Elgin Hittell, all of San Andreas; Amon Tanner, of Murphys and Frances Lombardi, of Mokelumne Hill, made up its board of directors.

With its formation, the historical society undertook publication of its quarterly historical bulletin "Las Calaveras". For 12 years Dr. Wood served as its editor. That position was taken over in mid-1964 by Willard P. Fuller, of San Andreas who continued as editor for more

than 20 years. And, over the years this quarterly publication has become a well respected chronicler of Sierra Foothill history.

In addition, the Calaveras County Historical Society has published a Family Ranch Album which had been started by the County Grange. The society also put into print a 160-page Pioneer School Album covering the history of early Calaveras County Schools and has compiled a vast library of historic photographs of people, places and events of early Calaveras County.

Today, the Calaveras County Historical Society manages the Calaveras Courthouse Museum at 30 Main Street, in San Andreas, one of the most extensive and complete gold rush museums in the Mother Lode. It also conducts an annual history essay contest for children of Calaveras County, which brings to winners in the various grade categories, substantial cash prizes. In addition to helping interest school students in their local county history, these essay contests have helped substantially to the society's store of knowledge of its early days.

From its original 93 members, the Calaveras County Historical Society's membership has grown to more than 700, and each year it continues to increase.

NEW MEMBERS

The Calaveras County Historical Society welcomes the following new members:

Jean Trotter, Angels Camp.
 Mr. & Mrs. Edward Lark, Camp Connell.
 Mr. & Mrs. Timothy Martell, Pleasant Hill.
 John & Tina Van Der Woert, Mokelumne Hill.
 Miss Courtney Magina, Concord.
 Janette C. Wells, Wilseyville.
 Sheryl Waller, Mountain Ranch.
 Alberta Castle, Angels Camp.
 Alberta Bardsley, Altaville.
 Bill Villegas, San Sndreas.
 Cleo Neal Jacobs, Highland.

MONTE WOLFE, SHADOWY FIGURE OF THE SIERRA

By
George Hoeper

Who was Monte Wolfe?

For more than 30 years he prowled the high Sierra from Yosemite to the North Fork of the Mokelumne River and across the summit to Markleeville. He has been gone now for half-a-century, yet, facts concerning this mysterious mountain inhabitant still are occasionally coming to light.

Hermit...? Fugitive and camp thief...? Trapper and backwoods roustabout...? An educated man of many moods and shades of character who simply had chosen a solitary mountain life...? Certainly, depending upon who was referring to him, at one time or another he bore all of those designations. Many knew him back in the days when Ebbetts Pass still was distant and seldom traveled, but few could say they knew him well.

From where a youthful Monte Wolfe first hailed, no one seems to know. He was nearing at what today would be retirement age when he disappeared as mysteriously as he came. Generally, Wolfe's association with Ebbetts Pass area of Calaveras and Alpine Counties spans the late 1920's and the great depression years of the 1930's, but he apparently was frequenting the mountains long before then.

Monte claimed French-Canadian ancestry and his features showed traces of Native American. Tuolumne County residents remembered him in Groveland around 1915, where he worked for John Meyers, proprietor of the old Groveland Hotel. They estimated him at that time to be in his mid-thirties. It was one of the few times during the nearly 30 years Wolfe ranged the hills that he sought regular employment or civilization. It also should be noted that his stay in Groveland was of short duration.

However, there is evidence that Monte Wolfe was in the mountains well before 1915. A letter received in 1961 by Richard "Coke" Wood, eminent gold country historian and former editor of *Las Calaveras*, puts Wolfe in the mountains of Calaveras County as early as 1908. At that time Wolfe would have been something less than 30 years old.

The letter, written by Ira C. Shank, of Lodi, stated that one night in 1908 at a cattle camp east of Rail Road Flat, Monte Wolfe stepped from the shadows and joined him and the Schrack brothers and Sam Kirk at their camp fire.

"He was neat and an interesting storyteller," said Shank. "I was interested in him but the Schrack brothers were suspicious of him and called him a thief. The Schracks said he was hiding from justice, but Sam Kirk said he was an English remittance man whose family was paying him to stay out of England. They said he would appear at a camp fire as he did at ours and the next night show up at another camp 15 miles away." Shank said in later years he became well acquainted with Wolfe at Camp Tamarack and Wolfe became good friends with his son.

Monte Wolfe left Groveland and next showed up on Tuolumne County's Clavey River. There again he took up his romance with the wilderness that lasted until he disappeared during the winter of 1939-40, as silently and mysteriously as he had lived.

From his first camp on the Clavey Wolfe moved to the Jawbone Ridge area and 1924 found him camped at Bull Creek Meadows. Then Monte moved again, took up residence in a half cave-half cabin on Reed Creek where in winter, he trapped fur for a living.

It was about that time Wolfe had a brush with the law. First, there was an accusation of killing deer out of season -- probably true -- then, stories of cabin burglaries and of items missing from remote mines and cattle camps, began to circulate. There was trouble about a stolen rifle and the Tuolumne County Sheriff held a warrant for Wolfe's arrest.

Most of the tales involving Wolfe in theft or wrongdoing appeared to be based largely on rumor and suspicion. However, even if the Sheriff really had wanted to find the man and bring him in, the task would have required considerable doing. In addition to the job of locating him, no one was sure how kindly this mysterious man might take to arrest. More than a few considered Wolfe potentially dangerous. He was quick to anger, possessed exceptional physical strength and was known to be a deadly rifle shot. On more than one occasion Wolfe hinted that he had killed a man. It appeared that as long as no one pressed the issue, the sheriff preferred to let sleeping dogs lie.

However, the suspicion of him was growing, Monte apparently felt it prudent to abandon Tuolumne County. He moved north to the Mokelumne River drainage and set up camp in Hermit Valley. That probably was in the summer of 1925. Shortly, he moved again, this time into the rough, granite strewn Mokelumne River canyon near the mouth of Deer Creek. There Wolfe built his first cabin, a snug log shelter battened with split shakes that defied the winter cold.

The summer of 1926 saw Monte at Lake Alpine

where B.R. Gianelli was building Lake Alpine Lodge. Wolfe almost singlehandedly built the huge granite fireplace that today still warms the lodge.

Wolfe became a frequent visitor at the lodge and it was there the following year, an incident occurred that throws a bit more light on his background. The October 8, 1927 issue of the Calaveras Californian carried the following article:

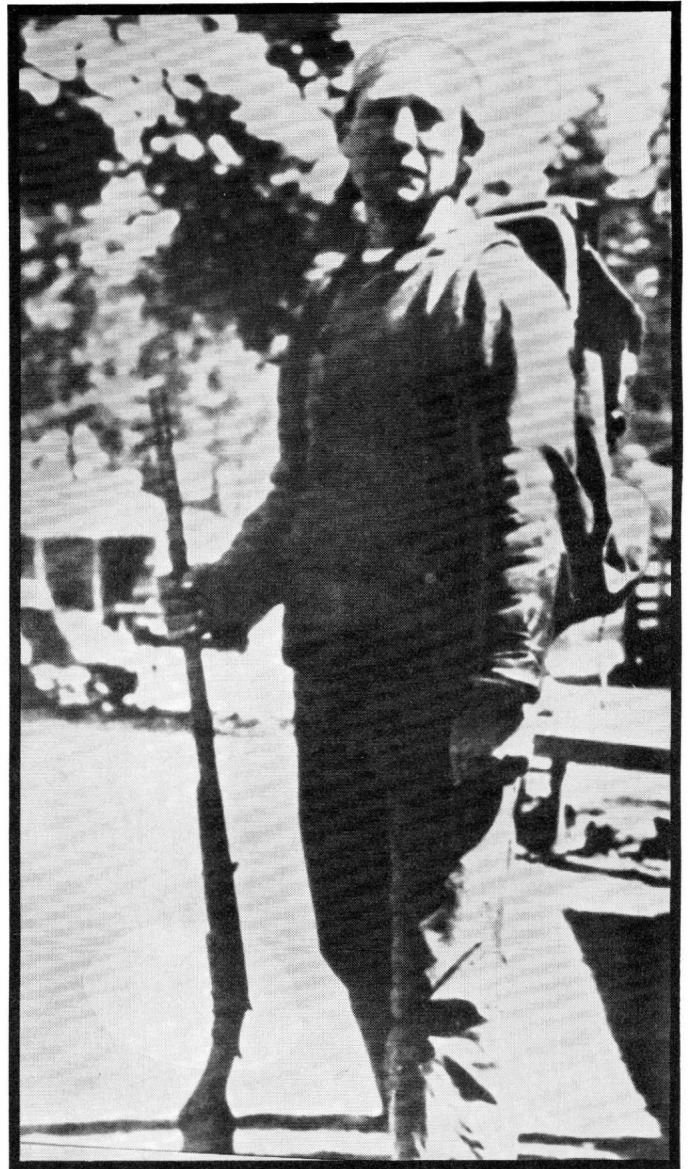
THE WOLF SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN CORNERED

Archie E. Wright, known as Ed. McGrath, Archie Arlington, the Lone Wolf of the Sierra and Monte Wolfe, arrested some weeks ago at Lake Alpine by Sheriff Dambacher of Tuolumne County, has a prison record. Advice from C.S. Morill, superintendent of the Calif. State Bureau of Criminal Identification, who was supplied with fingerprints by Sheriff Dambacher of the man in custody and who compared them with the fingerprints on file at San Quentin, says the Wright in custody is the same Wright sentenced to prison from Stanislaus County for burglary in November, 1909, and was discharged from that institution in January, 1911.

There seems to be little question that Wright is the "Monte Wolfe" who ransacked and robbed numerous cabins in the mountains for a number of years."

Records of arrests and court actions which occurred in Tuolumne County 65 or more years ago, except for major cases, are long gone. Apparently the charges against Wolfe eventually were dropped, for he was soon back frequenting his old haunts in Calaveras and Alpine Counties.

Living in his Deer Creek cabin, Wolfe during the summer, at times worked building or clearing trail for the U.S. Forest Service or worked briefly for private individuals. He trapped fur in winter, ranging vast distances along the Sierra to take coyote, mink, otter, martin, fox and bobcat. Over that vast area he built a network of "spike camps" which he stocked with food and supplies. The food, some said, came from camps and cabins raided during the absence of their owners. His traplines stretched from the Mokelumne River canyon to Alpine and Duck Lakes south to the Clark Fork of the Stanislaus and eastward across the summit to Markleeville. Monte traveled the vast area on skis, defying winter storms. Occasionally, he dropped into cattle



Monte Wolfe in classic pose at Tamarack Lodge during late 1930's. About himself Wolfe created an aura of mystery.

camp or stayed overnight with people who had cabins in the mountains. But by and large, Wolfe chose the solitary life, living and traveling alone and unseen in the mountains for weeks on end.

Monte Wolfe was not a large man. His features closely resembled those of the American Indian and sometimes, probably for dramatic effect, he wore his hair long, in Indian style. Although not large in stature -- about five feet, seven inches tall -- Wolfe possessed the

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superb build of an athlete.

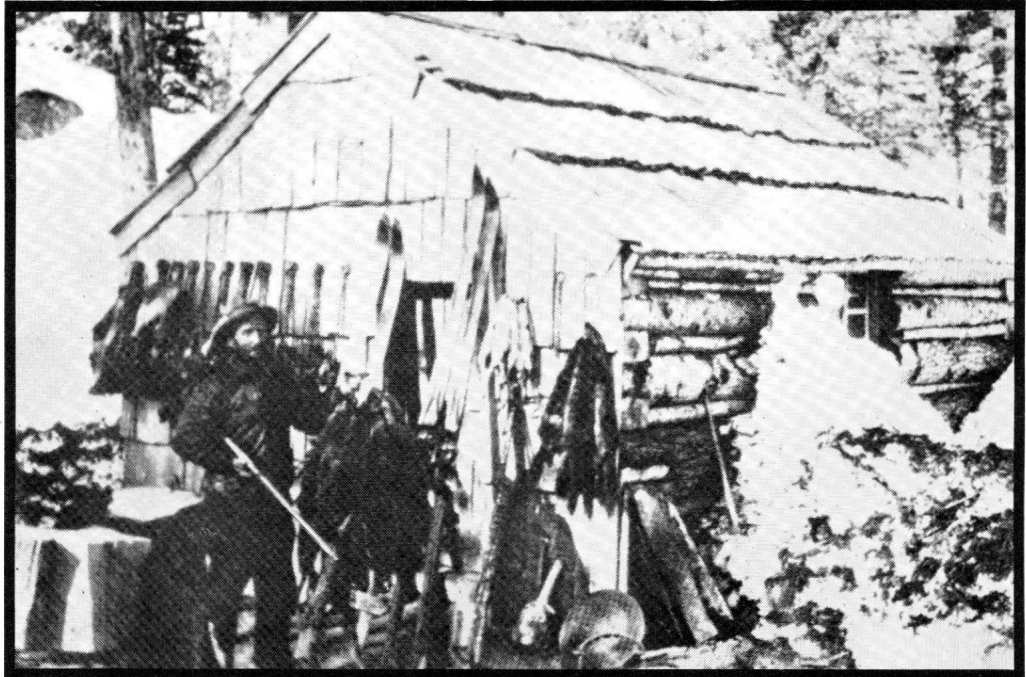
"I don't suppose Monte ever weighed more than 160 pounds," said the late Clifford Lombardi, of Mokelumne Hill, who as a young man, knew Wolfe well. "But Monte was solid muscle -- all man -- he had tremendous leg muscles and great body strength," said Lombardi. "He could pick up a pack that practically equalled his own weight and carry it all day. He could walk any man I ever knew right into the ground."

Among the people who knew Wolfe best were members of the Lombardi family whose cattle ranged the Mokelumne and Mt. Reba area; the brothers, Harry and Art Schimke, who wintered at Lake Alpine and the James Linford family of Oakland. The Lombardis regularly came into contact with Monte as they checked on wandering livestock and he often ate with them at their cow camp in Blood's Meadow. During the 1930's, when in winter the Schimkes served as gatekeepers at Lake Alpine for P.G.&E. and trapped the local area, they also came to know Monte Wolfe quite well. He often ate with them and spent the night at their cabin as he traveled to and from his own cabin deep in the Mokelumne River canyon. The Linfords met Wolfe during the early 1930's as they fished the North Fork and from those encounters a close friendship grew. Jim Linford, at Monte's request, eventually became his partner in the mining claim they filed on a quartz outcropping at Wolfe's lower cabin in 1935. The Linford family even today serves as guardians of that remote cabin site.

One example of Wolfe's enormous strength was told by Cliff Lombardi, who with his uncle, Louis, met Monte on the Mokelumne River trail below his cabin one summer afternoon. Said Lombardi, "Monte was returning from Salt Springs Reservoir where he had been scavaging building materials left there by P.G.&E. Among the things the company left, were several partially filled kegs of nails. Monte was carrying a big packsack on his back and as he approached, we could see it was

filled with nails. That load had to have weighed considerably more than a hundred pounds. We were seated on horseback but Monte was standing, never even seeming to notice the weight, as we talked for nearly an hour. Finally, he strode away, up the narrow, winding trail carrying that load of nails as easily as most men would have walked home with a loaf of bread. I doubt he stopped until he reached his cabin."

Another story, thoroughly authenticated, is that



Standing before his upper cabin, Monte proudly displayed his winter's catch of fur -- largely mink, pine martin and otter.

Wolfe back-packed a full size wood stove from a cabin in Hermit Valley, on Highway 4, several miles down the river to his cabin. Harry Schimke, now retired from the U.S. Forest Service, recalls the oddities of this strange man.

"Day or night seemed to mean little to Monte. He might arrive at our cabin at noon or midnight. He might step out of a blinding snowstorm to stay an hour or to spend the night," said Schimke.

"Sometimes Wolfe would rise from bed during the night, quickly dress, shoulder his pack and leave without a word. We might not see him again for a month or he might return the next day. With us, Monte was always friendly. He was an interesting conversationalist when he chose to be," said Schimke. "I don't believe he ever stole so much as a match from us, although we often found evidence that he had been in our cabin while we were gone."

Yet, Harry Schimke admits that allegations about Wolfe being a camp thief probably were true, and that Wolfe, embittered at some individual, would in their absence turn their camp or cabin into utter shambles.

That Monte Wolfe could fly into quick and dangerous rages was recalled by B.R. Gianelli, builder and for many years, operator of Lake Alpine Lodge. Gianelli owned a cabin far back in the mountains of Tuolumne County and one summer told Wolfe he could use it as a winter trap line cabin. Then, forgetting he had given Wolfe permission to use it, Gianelli told another man -- a semi-professional boxer -- he could use the cabin during deer season.

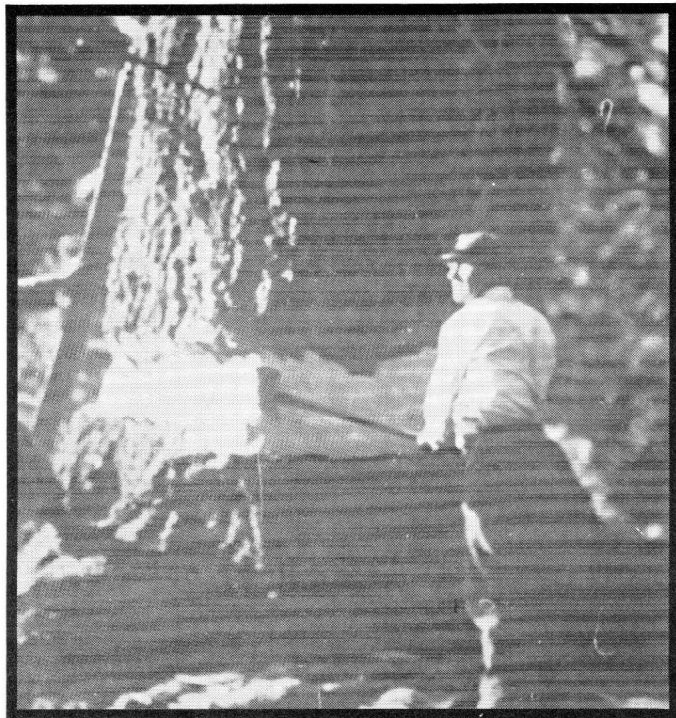
Monte and the deer hunter arrived at the cabin at the same time and a dispute, reportedly pushed by Wolfe, broke out over its use. From words, the argument moved to blows, and Wolfe stood toe-to-toe with the prize fighter and slugged it out. The fight went on for half-an-hour and finally, both men cut and bloody, stepped back virtually exhausted. Wolfe, according to his opponent, picked up a double bitted axe which had been sticking in a chopping block and the fighter, seeing the danger, grabbed a steel crowbar which had been leaning against the cabin. The fight ended there -- in a bitter draw.

"If the crowbar hadn't been there, I don't think there is a doubt but what Wolfe would have used that axe," the deer hunter later told Gianelli.

Monte lived in his Deer Creek cabin for several seasons and it was there in the early 1930's he met Jim Linford and his family. However, Wolfe was satisfied neither with his cabin, which he said was too small, or its location which he felt was too near Highway Four and too accessible to people who wandered into the canyon from Hermit Valley.

By the mid-1930's Monte was completing a larger and better built cabin some seven miles further downstream, beyond a rough section of trail he called The Devil's Staircase. Jim Linford, who by now had become a close friend, helped Monte set the ridge pole of the new cabin. There, Monte raised an annual garden, continued to trap in winter, served as a guide for hunters and fisherman and taught young John Linford the art of fly fishing. On July 4, 1935, Monte filed a mining claim on a large quartz ledge below his cabin, with Jim Linford as a partner.

A month later, while guiding a party of fisherman into Wheeler Lake, Monte Wolfe fell and fractured a leg. The leg required considerable time for healing and Monte was away from the mountains for the better part of a year.



Few woodsmen could handle a double-bitted axe as well as Monte Wolfe...

Following his release from the hospital in San Andreas, the Linfords looked after Monte Wolfe and his cabin, but it was a fretful time for Monte, for he missed the mountains terribly. And, although he did not admit it, Monte, who by that time was nearing 60, never recovered his old stamina.

With their friendship even more closely cemented, Monte during the next few years was at times a guest at the Linford's Oakland home. They sold his winter catches of furs for him, corresponded with him and sent him medicine and other necessities. In 1938, Monte, pretty much back to his old form, again was on skis, trapping and helping conduct winter snow surveys at high Sierra measuring stations from Sonora Pass to Tahoe.

The last time Jim Linford saw Monte Wolfe was on November 10, 1939, when Jim and a friend met Monte at Mike Hunt's cabin in Pacific Valley for a bear hunt. They saw no bear. Jim gave Monte a pair of buckskin gloves to replace a pair Monte lost. They parted with the agreement that Monte would write in the late spring to tell them about the prospects for fishing.

In March, 1940, the Schimke brothers found fresh ski tracks they took to be Monte Wolfe's, near Wheeler Lake. The Linfords had no reason to worry about Monte

Please see MONTE, pg. 24

MONTE, cont. from pg. 23

until well into May when his expected letter failed to arrive.

Then, on June 24, 1940, a friend of Wolfe's phoned Jim Linford to say he had just returned from Hermit Valley and had found no trace of Monte.

On June 28, John Linford, then 18 years old, hiked down the river trail to the upper cabin. Its interior was untouched. At the lower cabin the scene was much the same except that beside an empty food dish was Monte's cat which had starved to death. There were dishes on the table as though Monte had just finished a meal. The last date marked off on the calendar was April 20.

Monte's belongings, guns and fishing tackle stood untouched except that his favorite trout rod, a fishing creel and the canvas Keds he always wore when fishing, were gone. It appeared Monte had left with the intention of being gone only a short time. The Linfords surmise that he went fishing, even though the river was at flood stage and somehow slipped or fell into the river. No human could have survived, they said, in that ice-cold torrent. The U.S. Forest Service in its official findings on Monte Wolfe's disappearance, agrees with the Linford

theory.

But, there are other stories and whispered theories concerning the disappearance of Monte Wolfe. Some, including Cliff Lombardi, believed that Wolfe, tiring of the wilderness and knowing he was beginning physically to fail, went back to Canada where he said a sister still lived.

"It would be just like him to disappear that way," said Lombardi. "Monte always liked to be mysterious and dramatic."

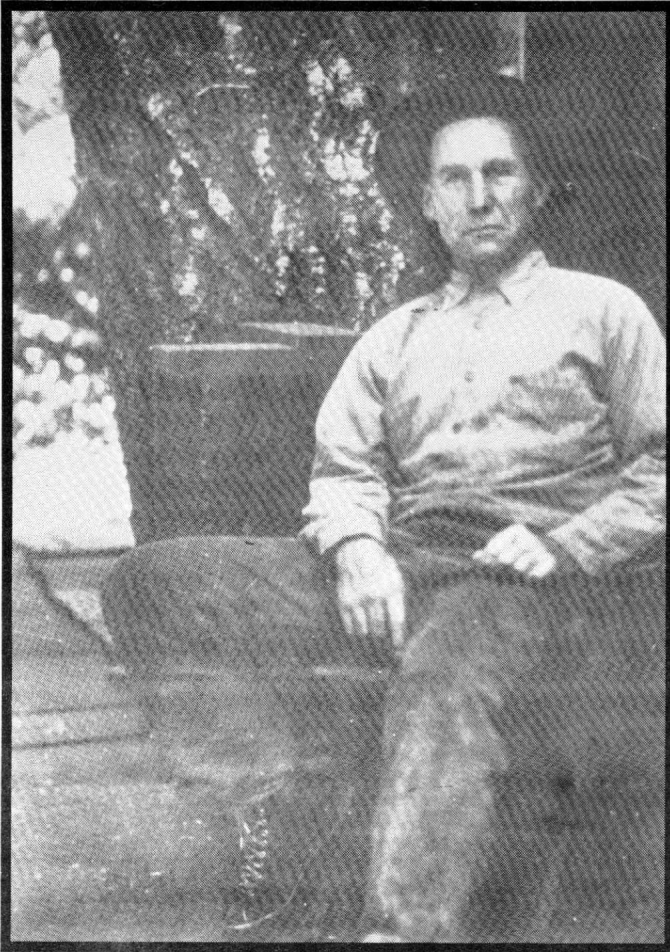
Over the years Monte had made his share of enemies, that is an acknowledged fact. There is another story, of a long-standing grudge and a rifle bullet which ended it when Monte stepped to his cabin door to investigate a visitor's shout.

Harry Schimke is certain that Monte was building a third cabin on the south side of the Mokelumne River canyon somewhere below snow valley. He says that year -- in the spring of 1940 -- a snow avalanche swept the area, demolishing everything in its path, and that Wolfe, camped there while starting his new cabin may have been caught in that monstrous snow slide.

Mrs. Sydney Whiteside had lived in Big Trees,



The lower Monte Wolfe cabin in the Mokelumne River Canyon -- a wilderness shrine



Monte Wolfe at rest at his wilderness camp ... Note the Keds tennis shoes he always wore while fishing the Mokelumne River.

Tamarack, and in the Camp Connell-Dorrington area. She and he husband were among the people who had befriended Monte while he recuperated from his broken leg. While she was at Dorrington Monte would often slip into the Whiteside home and leave a platter of trout in her refrigerator. Some months after Monte had been reported missing, Mrs. Whiteside after being gone for part of the day, returned home to find a platter of fat, freshly caught trout in her refrigerator.

Monte Wolfe has been gone now for more than 50 years. The answer to how or why he disappeared is anybody's choice.

Some 20 years ago the U.S. Forest Service, noting that Monte's upper cabin had deteriorated to the point of being uninhabitable and fearing it might become a gathering place for undesirables, burned the weathered structure, leaving not a trace. But Wolfe's lower cabin,

under the stewardship of the Linfords, and defying time and winter snows, still stands intact in the North Fork of the Mokelumne River Canyon.

And today, a small group of Sierra natives, members of old mountain families who knew, or whose parents knew Monte Wolfe, have pledged themselves to preserve Wolfe's lower cabin. With John Linford or some other members of his family, or sometimes by themselves, each summer they hike to the cabin deep in the river canyon to make necessary repairs and preserve the spirit of a man who knew and loved the wilderness and met it on its own terms.

MONTE WOLFE REMEMBERED

Monte Wolfe has been gone for half-a-century but memories of him live on, perpetuated by the tales that grew up about him and the mountains in which he lived. And, from the oral history and the effort to preserve it, has grown an organization to gather and keep alive the true facts surrounding this mysterious man and preserve his cabin as a wilderness shrine.

The Monte Wolfe Foundation -- a non-profit organization -- was formed some years ago for the specific purpose of carrying out those objectives. Included in its small membership are those such as John Linford and Harry Schimke who knew Wolfe during his latter days. Others are sons and daughters of men and women who knew and associated with Monte, while still others simply are people who have fallen under the spell of this lonely mountain traveler and the wilderness in which he lived.

Each fall, foundation members gather to exchange information concerning Wolfe and the Mokelumne River Canyon, and to hear the annual report concerning condition of the Wolfe cabin and the latest effort to maintain it. Key members of the foundation also are the same men and women who make the annual trek down the river to keep the cabin in repair.

Through the kindness and hospitality of Judith Marvin, of Murphys, these annual gatherings are held at the Historic Sheep Ranch Hotel, of which she is an owner. Dinners are prepared by Tom Garamendi, who also is one of those who makes the annual trip to keep Monte's cabin in repair. Repairs, over the years, have included everything from repairing the shake roof to replacing a log in the cabin wall and repairing extensive damage caused by a marauding bear.

And, virtually every year at these meetings as members gather and stories are exchanged, a bit of new information is added to the history of Monte Wolfe.

Calaveras County Historical Society

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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

Calaveras County Historical Society wishes to thank the following persons who recently made donations of cash, artifacts and materials of historical interest to the Calaveras County Museum.

Howard Blagen, Mokelumne Hill: \$50 cash donation

Mrs. Charlotte Irvine, Palo Alto: Photos and records from the Carson Hill mining area.

Willard P. Fuller Jr., San Andreas: Books and old prints

Sydney Farber, San Andreas: 1947 issue of Buick Magazine containing an article on stage coach bandit Black Bart.

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Cooper, Lafayette: California geological and mineralogical survey books.

MEETING SCHEDULE

This month's meeting of the Calaveras County Historical Society will be at 7:30 p.m. in the Veterans Hall in Angels Camp. Guest Speaker will be Altaville school instructor Ted Byrd, who will present the history of the old mining town of Melones.

Author and historian O. Henry Mace, of Jackson, will be guest speaker at the Society's dinner meeting at 7 p.m., February 25, in the Leger Hotel in Mokelumne Hill. Mace will speak on the history of the "Gold Camps of Mokelumne River."

The Society's meeting of March 25 will be in the historic Calaveras County Courthouse-Museum. 30 N. Main Street, San Andreas, at 7:30 p.m. The meeting will feature the opening of the Society's annual Quilt and Textile Show. Featured speaker will be Cindy Bane Mammon, of Oakly, whose subject will be "Quilts and Stitching for Quilts."

Editorial

THANK YOU, VOLUNTEERS

During the past year countless members of this historical society have given unselfishly of their time to ensure continued successful operation of our Calaveras County Courthouse Museum. The same has proven true of its many other undertakings throughout the year, including our recent christmas Open House and Antique Toy Show in the old courthouse complex. In each case it was members who came forth as volunteers to make each of these programs work.

At its October anniversary dinner the Historical Society proudly looked back on 40 years of achievement. In doing so, it renewed its dedication to continued preservation of this county's history and gold rush heritage. Rest assured, this society will carry out its mandate. And, as they have for four decades, they will likely be volunteers who will accomplish the bulk of those achievements.

IN MEMORIAM

Evelyn Arthur, Murphys, CA., Nov. 19, 1992
Robin Brooks, Sutter Creek, CA., Nov. 27, 1992
Joe H. Wright, Mokelumne Hill, CA., Nov. 21, 1992