



JUMPING FROGS IN TIMES OF TURMOIL

By Noah Berner

Although the Calaveras County Fair and Jumping Frog Jubilee was canceled in 2020 and replaced with the Calaveras Homecoming in 2021 due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, it wasn't the first time that the event had to adapt to worldwide events.

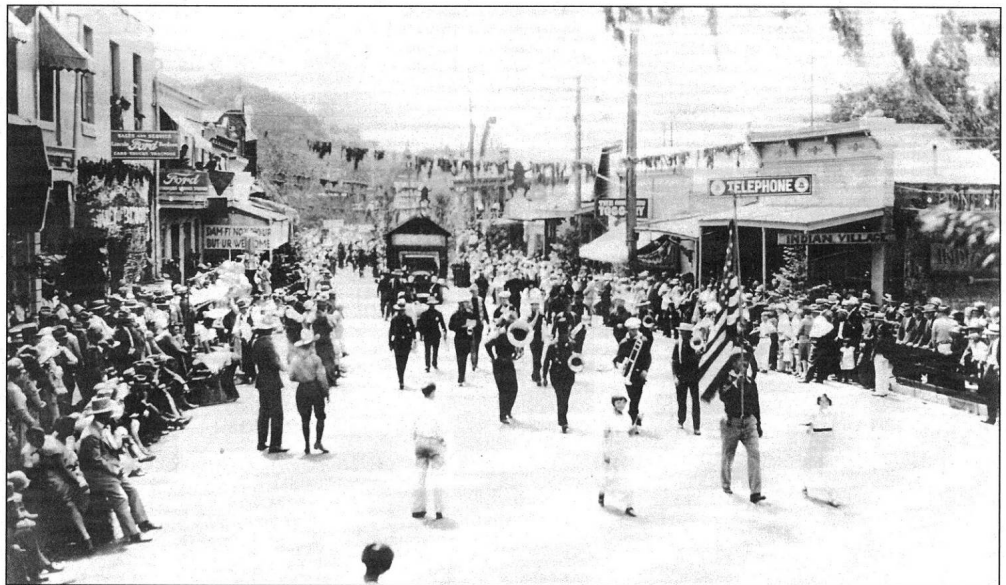
Both the Great Depression and World War II had significant impacts on the annual celebration.

The first Jumping Frog Jubilee drew a crowd of 15,000 to Main Street in Angels Camp in 1928. While the annual event was a huge success, it was canceled only five years into its brief history.

In 1933, the Angels Boosters Club reluctantly decided to cancel the event due to the Great Depression. By then, the Jumping

Frog Jubilee was known across the country, and newspapers from as far as the East Coast relayed the news.

"Jumping frogs of Calaveras County, famous since the days of Mark Twain's buckshot handicap, may be destined for platter this year instead of athletic fame," an article from a New York newspaper reads.



A parade wends its way down Main Street during the first Jumping Frog Jubilee in May of 1928.



Thousands of people flood Main Street in Angels Camp for the first Jumping Frog Jubilee.

“We attended the most picturesque and colorful event in California the other day when we visited the notorious Camp Angels,” the letter reads. “Most of the people were dressed in real western clothes and it took one back in reality to the ‘Days of Old and the Days of Gold,’ and they are again days of gold here in California because gold mining is on the boom everywhere. California is truly the Golden State—golden poppies everywhere now—and gold mines everywhere—all

“The committee in charge of the annual jumping jubilee admitted as much today. With many sighs and headshakings, it was generally agreed the financial prospects for a 1933 renewal of the amphibian games were not bright. In fact, members of the committee indicated, even funds for the red flannel used by trainers to entice their entries into bigger and better jumps appear doubtful.”

The event was officially called off a few days later.

“There may be mournful croakings among the marshes from Florida to Washington yesterday for business conditions have caused the cancellation of this year’s annual jumping frog jubilee,” a Washington, D.C. newspaper reported. “The Boosters’ Club, which has sponsored the contest that drew amphibian contestants from all over the United States and even Europe, met tonight and decided conditions did not warrant continuance of the feature.”

By 1934, economic prospects had improved in Angels Camp, due in part to the increase in the value of gold to \$35 an ounce earlier that year.

“The spirit of carnival for the 1934 jubilee is heightened by the higher gold price that has reopened nearly all of the old diggings famous in the history of the Mother Lode,” the Stockton Independent reported.

A letter to the editor in an Illinois newspaper described the event.

employing full capacity shifts.”

A crowd estimated at 20,000 returned to Main Street that year, and the former champion jumper, “Budweiser,” of Stockton, was defeated by a hometown frog.

“‘Budweiser’ was sluggish in today’s competition and, after a heartless effort, wiggled against the sunny side of a rock and went to sleep,” the San Francisco Examiner reported. “The new champion, owned by Louis Crispi, Angels Camp civic leader, is a lusty bullfrog, reared from a tadpole in Crispi’s backyard.”

In the following years, the Jumping Frog Jubilee continued to grow, and in 1937, the event merged with the Calaveras County Fair and moved away from Main Street, landing in Frogtown in 1938.

But worldwide events again impacted Angels Camp after the United States entered World War II in December of 1941. Although the fair and jubilee were almost canceled, the crowds once again gathered in Angels Camp in May of 1942.

“Despite the wartime ban on most large gatherings in California, the annual jumping frog jubilee at Angels Camp, immortalized in Mark Twain’s celebrated ‘Jumping Frog of Calaveras (C)ounty,’ will be ‘biggah and bettuh’ than ever this year,” an Oklahoma newspaper reported. “More than 300 limber-legged croakers, entered by army posts, governors, movie stars and

ordinary citizens, are scheduled to compete in the Derby.”

War restrictions weren't the only factor that almost hindered the jubilee that year.

“Booster President Bill Wion is all smiles again after recovering from the frog scarcity scare of last week,” a Calaveras Californian article reads. “For awhile the Boosters thought they would have to stage a Frog Jubilee without frogs but with the nights getting warmer, frog catching experts have announced the supply will be plentiful shortly.”

The entertainment on Saturday evening featured a two-hour show with a national defense theme, which included patriotic songs and a speech from five-year-old Mokelumne Hill orator John Cuneo, Jr. The program climaxed with a demonstration from the state fire marshall on methods used in extinguishing incendiary bombs.

The 1942 Calaveras County Fair and Jumping Frog Jubilee went on as planned, but this wasn't the case the following year, when fuel shortages brought about by the war led to the cancellation of the fair and a scaled-back version of the jubilee, which was billed as the Horse and Buggy Picnic.

“Although the Angels Camp Booster Club's annual event is not being sponsored this year on its usual elaborate scale, efforts are being made by club members to keep the traditional event 'alive' by the holding of a 'horse-and-buggy' picnic at Frogtown Sunday,” an article in the Calaveras Prospect reads. “As part of the committee's program to keep alive the spirit and traditions of the Jubilee, all residents of Angels Camp are urged to 'dress up' in their forty-niner Jubilee clothes, starting next Monday morning, and continuing through to the following Sunday.”

The Oakland Tribune lent its perspective on the event in a brief article.

“But for the war, Angels Camp this weekend would be going in for hilarity in a big way, turning back the pages to the days of the original jumping frog,” the article reads. “Denied the chance to invite the world to their fun, the people of Calaveras County are going to get better acquainted with one another. The frog will jump to an intimate and neighborhood applause.”

A parade of old-time vehicles had been a prominent feature of the Jumping Frog Jubilee since the beginning. In order to conserve gasoline and



A group gathers for a photo at the Jumping Frog Jubilee in 1928.



This postcard shows a sidewalk scene during the Jumping Frog Jubilee in the 1930s.

tires, the event’s organizers came up with a creative way to address the transportation issue.

“Transportation, mainly by hay wagons, horse-drawn buggies and other early-day vehicles, is planned for all attending,” a Calaveras Prospect article reads. “It is particularly requested that automobile transportation to the grounds be reduced to an absolute minimum and the committee requests all attending to take advantage of the transportation to be provided.”

A parade of horse-drawn vehicles led by the Angels Miners’ Band began transporting picnickers from Main Street in Angels Camp to the fairgrounds at 10:30 a.m. on May 16.

Visitors were encouraged to bring “plenty of eats,” as only soft drinks would be on sale at the fairgrounds.

The highlight of the event was the frog jumping competition, which saw Roy Weimer, of Angels Camp, take first, second and third place.

Weimer reportedly had a side business providing frogs for the event, raising his prices from \$1 a frog before the war to \$5 a frog during the war years.

“Thunderbolt” came in first, followed by “Submarine” in second and “War Bond” in third.

“War Conscious Frogs Win Jumping Contests At Booster Club Picnic,” a Calaveras Prospect headline reads.

About 600 people attended the event, which lasted from noon to 6 p.m. In addition to frog jumping, the festivities included other competitions, races and games for all ages.

Four horse events were staged, which included ring-lancing, musical chairs, potato spearing and obstacle racing. A horseshoe tournament and a bingo game were held, along with a baseball game between men and boys that ended in a 6 to 6 tie.

Among the events was a marble gathering competition, in which 60 children scrambled to collect 1,000

marbles tossed onto the racetrack.

For women, a husband-calling contest and a rolling pin-throwing contest were staged, as well as a softball game between married and single women, which was won by the married team 14 to 5.

“I’ll never forget how mad some of the girls on the single girls’ baseball team got when the married ladies won,” Calaveras Californian editor Hildred Mayo Cooper recounted years later. “I was on that married team, and it was hard work.”

The Jumping Frog Jubilee was scaled back again in 1944 and 1945, and the Calaveras County Fair was again canceled during those years.

In 1944, the jubilee featured the special showing of the Warner Bros. film “The Adventures of Mark Twain” and the dedication of a life-size statue of the famous humorist.



An ox team moves down Main Street during the Jumping Frog Jubilee in the 1930s.

Guests of the Booster's Club included 30 representatives from leading California newspapers, radio and newsreel organizations, as well as representatives from Warner Bros. and actors in the movie.

The film was shown Saturday, Sunday and Monday at the Angels Theater. Among the stars of the film was "Sugar," an amphibian actor who had secured a movie deal by winning the 1942 frog jumping competition.

On Sunday, the Mark Twain statue was dedicated in Utica Park. The statue was constructed by Italian sculptor P. C. Manuelli and features Twain surrounded by frogs jumping from bullrushes.

In the frog jumping competition, Merlin Fischer, a 13-year-old from Stockton, set a new world record with a 16-foot, 2-inch jump by his frog, "Maggie."

Instead of cash, winners received war bonds and war stamps, with first place awarded a \$50 war bond.

On May 15, the Calaveras Californian carried a letter to the editor from a local soldier named Lester Osborn. He said that he was having trouble explaining the jubilee to his new acquaintances.

"People just can't figure out what the Jumping Frog Jubilee is," the letter reads. "I have told them about it but some won't believe me. I sure wish some of the people I have met could see the Jubilee some time."

In 1945, the frog jumping competition was again won by Weimer, who had swept the competition in 1943. Though his frog, "Can't Take It," fell short of capturing the record, he did secure a \$25 war bond.

Following the end of the war, the Calaveras County Fair and Jumping Frog Jubilee returned in full force in 1946, and in 1947, the Calaveras Californian reported that the event had drawn the largest crowd in its history.

With the exceptions of 1933 and 2020, a frog jumping competition has been held in Angels Camp every year since 1928.

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A statue of Mark Twain is dedicated in Utica Park in Angels Camp during the Jumping Frog Jubilee in May of 1944.

Calaveras County Historical Society

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Museum Hours of Operation

Downtown & Bookstore	Red Barn
Daily	FR-SA-SU
10:00 am-4:00 pm	10:00 am-4:00 pm

Remember! Historical Society Members pay NO Admittance Fee!

2022 Coming Events

April 28—"Mastodons Among Us"

by Greg Francek of EBMUD

Jenny Lind Veterans' Hall—Valley Springs

5:00pm—Welcome

6:00pm—Dinner 7:00pm—Presentation

May 26—The Legacy of Wells Fargo & Calaveras County

Michelle Bollinger Manager Wells Fargo

San Andreas Town Hall

5:00pm—Welcome

6:00pm—Dinner 7:00pm—Presentation

June 23—CCHS Annual Business Meeting

Senders Ranch

5:00pm—Welcome

6:00pm—Dinner 7:00pm—Presentation

Recent Donations

Catherine Brady-Brown: Ceramic toiletry set

Fred Secada: Various documents, one involving Standard Oil Co. and the Sierra Railway Co.

Lupe C. Arness: Family photographs and a newspaper article

Jennifer Brock: Mark Twain book set

Jim Catlin: Stereoscopic slides of original Hogan Dam

Karen Harper: J.A. Smith scrapbooks, cameras and Calaveras Cement Co. baseball uniform

Ken Snyder: E.E. Wood election token

Phil D. Alberts: Miscellaneous books and historical documents

Bank of Stockton: Monetary Donation

THANK YOU!

New Members

Rachelle, Jeff and Abby Whiting

Doug McNeill

John Van Nieuwenhuyzen

Fara Roberts

Paul & Cary Camilleri

WELCOME!