



Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society

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Stories in Stone—Part I

THE STORIES BEHIND CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL MARKERS

by *Charity Maness*

Editor's Note:

This is the first in a series of bulletins covering our county's historical markers. I sincerely hope you enjoy the stories in stone. All information gleaned for these articles was found within the many files at the Calaveras Historical Society, as well as resources such as Calaveras History.org and the California Digital Newspaper Collection.

On any given day as you travel on the beautiful highways and back roads that wind through Calaveras County you may be fortunate enough to come across a historical marker or two. Whether you choose to stop or not is a personal preference. But if you choose to stop you will learn the most interesting tidbits of our county's early history.

The historical markers have been carefully researched and lovingly constructed throughout the county by organizations such as (but not limited to) California State Parks Office of Historic Preservation, Calaveras County Historical Society, Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West,

Calaveras Chamber of Commerce and E Clampus Vitus Matuca Chapter.

While much research and work goes into these markers, space often limits the ability to tell the complete story. And with Calaveras being no stranger to early California history—its mining history woven into the very fabric of the fledgling state—it's no wonder the county boasts dozens upon dozens of registered landmarks and historical markers within its county lines.

This *Las Calaveras* series will pick up where the stories in stone left off.

Valley Springs Marker No. 251:

Inscription: *The original three foot narrow gauge line was built by the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada Railroad, extending from Brack's Landing on the Mokelumne River, East to Valley Spring. The depot and turntable were built around the time of the completion of the last section, which was finished in April 1885, at a total cost of \$409,570.00. The line was changed to standard gauge by the*

Southern Pacific around 1904. It was then extended 13 miles further east to Kentucky House to service the Calaveras Cement Company in 1925. But the line continued to serve as a freight line until the closure of the cement plant. The last rail shipment of cement was in 1983.

Located at the intersection of State Highways 12 and 26, Valley Springs.

As towns often carried the name of its post office, the first choice was rumored to be that of Spring Valley after the nearby Spring Valley Hotel, yet that post office name was already taken. So the names were reversed and the town became Valley Spring or Valley Springs, depending upon which historian is authoring the research text.

In 1855 George Late arrived in Valley Springs, with his young bride Rebecca, and began construction of a home built from limestone quarried from a hill near the town. Warren Lamb was an early entrepreneur in Valley Springs building and operating a saloon, restaurant and stables. At this time the railroad had yet to reach Valley Springs, but it was the perfect location for mule teams and stages headed for the mountain towns to rest and stay the night. The blacksmith shop, owned by Harvey Smith, was a booming business as the horses and mules used to draw the stages and freight to the various mountain towns needed his expert blacksmith and farrier skills.

In 1884 the town moved about two miles westerly of Pattee's Place (Pattee Ranch) in anticipation of the soon-to-come railroad. That same year a town-site of more than 20 blocks was laid out, lots were quickly sold and building began in earnest. The few buildings that had remained at Pattee's Place moved to the

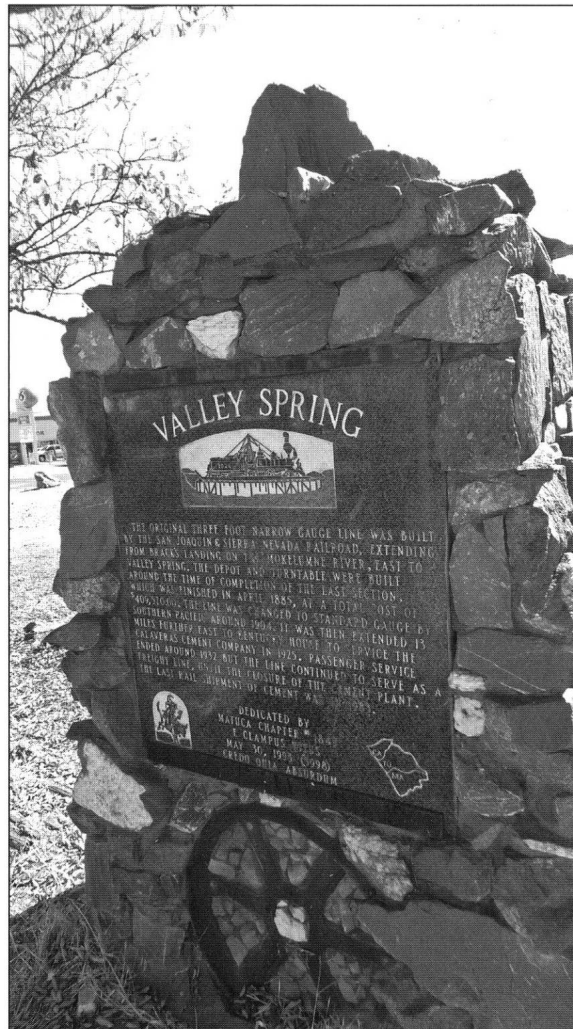


Photo by Charity Maness.

new town location including the post office, a general store and a saloon. Soon, a hotel was built, as well as Paulk Bros & Johnson Farmers' and Miner's Store.

In 1889 Englishman F. B. Lewis bought the Plummer House and operated it as a hotel. Unfortunately, Lewis became an example of how crime often follows growth. The August 17, 1890 edition of the *Daily Alta California* reported that on, "August 16th.—F. B. Lewis, a hotel keeper at Valley Springs, Calaveras County, the terminus of the narrow gauge railroad, was seriously stabbed in the stomach this evening by a man whose name could not be learned..." Dr. Clark of Stockton was summoned via telegraph and traveled the forty miles to tend to Lewis. No mention was made if the wound was fatal or not.

The first San Joaquin & Southern Nevada Railroad train pulled into the Valley Springs station tent on April 25, 1885. Later in the year the train depot was constructed. Valley Springs became the freight distribution center for the county after the railroad did not uphold its promise to extend the line to Big Trees. The railroad discontinued passenger service in 1932 and freight in the 1980s.

San Andreas

Marker No. 252:

Inscription: "Heart of the Southern Mines—Settled by Mexicans in 1848 and named after the Catholic parish of St. Andrew. First newspaper published here Sept 24, 1846. Destroyed by fire June 4, 1858, and in 1863. County seat of Calaveras County since 1866. Rendezvous of Joaquin Murietta, Black Bart, notorious stage robber tried and sent to prison from here. Noted

mining camp since early days. Gold from the surrounding ancient river channels and placer mines contributed greatly to the success of the Union during the Civil War.”

Located at the northwest corner of Highway 49 and Main Street in San Andreas.

San Andreas holds a veritable web of historical stories and locations, but this issue of *Las Calaveras* will focus on the journey of the courthouse and jail to its location in San Andreas.

During the Gold Rush the Calaveras County Seat seemed to have as many homes as miners had shovels. The first county seat was located at Double Springs (Marker No. 264), between San Andreas and Valley Springs, with the first court of sessions being held in a canvas tent. Soon a ‘kit’ courthouse was imported from China, with instructions printed in Chinese on each panel. This prefabricated building has been preserved and now resides in the Calaveras County historical museum; reconstructed and reduced in size to fit in the museum.

In 1850 the county seat was moved to Jackson—which lay within the borders of Calaveras County at that time—even though there was a desire among many to move the court to Mokelumne Hill.

Local lore has it that the presiding Judge at the time, Judge William Fowle Smith, described as ‘a miserable concentration of meanness’, tried to rig the vote as he wanted the county seat to remain in Jackson; more votes were cast than the actual population at the time. The County Clerk, Colonel Lewis Collier—said to have naturalized 60 foreigners in one day charging an ounce of gold each which lined his pockets—wanted it moved to Mokelumne Hill. A fight ensued in which some records state Collier threatened to shoot Smith on sight.

Mokelumne Hill Marker No. 269:

Inscription: *“Mokelumne is an Indian word, first applied to the nearby river. Earliest settlement was at Happy Valley by French trappers. Gold was*

discovered by discharged members of Stevenson’s regiment in 1848. Mokelumne Hill was the center of the richest placer mining section of Calaveras County and one of the principle mining towns in California. Corral Flat produced over thirty million in gold. Sixteen feet square constituted a claim. The so-called ‘French War’ for possession of gold mines occurred in 1851. ‘Calaveras Chronicle’ was established in 1850. Fights between grizzly bears and bulls amused early residents. The town was destroyed by fires in 1854, 1864, and 1874. County seat of Calaveras County from 1853 to 1866.”

By 1853, the county seat had moved to Mokelumne Hill. The Hotel Leger gained some of its early fame because a portion of the original building was used as the county courthouse and jail.

The vote to move the courthouse to San Andreas took place in 1863, with 3,567 of the 6,914 votes cast in favor of the move. However, the results were met with resistance and litigation. Finally, in October 1866 the county seat was officially moved to San Andreas and the Mokelumne Hill courthouse, purchased for \$8,190.00 in 1854 was sold at auction for \$400.00. The first court session at the new county seat was held in Sharp’s Theater on December 12, 1866, while construction of the new \$14,300.00 courthouse was underway. The courthouse was completed in February 1868.

In November 1883 the San Andreas courthouse made its mark in gold mining era lore as it is the



Double Springs Courthouse circa 1930. Calaveras Historical Society Photo.



Photo courtesy Calaveras County Historical Society, Calaveras County Courthouse prior to construction of the Hall of Records in 1893.

court where the legendary gentleman bandit, Black Bart went on trial for the Sonora-Milton stagecoach robbery at Funk Hill on November 3, 1883. On November 17, 1883 Bolton (aka Black Bart) waived his right to a jury trial, confessed to the Sonora-Milton stage robbery and was sentenced to six years in San Quentin.

While the location is not known, somewhere on the grounds outside the jail, there reportedly once existed a dungeon; a pit in the ground large enough for one man. An additional small building just behind the jail is said to have housed the insane. In a lonely, shaded corner, surrounded by the old rock wall and shrubbery exists the setting of where the gallows were once constructed. Close enough to the jail cells that each hammered nail hit into the boards was heard by those awaiting their ultimate end. George Cox, convicted of killing his son-in-

law, was the last inmate to be hung in San Andreas in 1888. For the hanging of Cox, Sheriff Benjamin Thorn had special gallows built and sent out 250 handwritten invitations.

Sandy Gulch ***Marker No. 253:***

Inscription: *This monument was erected to the memory of pioneers of Sandy Gulch, 1849 trading center for miners of northeastern Calaveras County. The settlement, in an area that was home to many Miwok Indians, was named after the gulch where William and Dan Carsner found large nuggets of gold embedded in the coarse sands. Water for mining was brought from the middle fork of the Mokelumne River through Sandy Gulch and Kadish Ditches—quartz mining began in the early 1850s, and the first custom stamp mill in the*

district was located at the head of Sandy Gulch. School and election precincts were established early, and one of California's many Hangman's Trees stood near the center of town.

Located on State Highway 26, 2.1 miles west of West Point.

"Sandy Gulch, how that name rings a bell in my memory," wrote Cecille Vandel McMilltion in a letter written in 1961. *"Sandy Gulch; where my mother Laura Mabel Breve Vandel Bennett was born... July 2, 1869."*

Sandy Gulch, once the thriving trading center for miners of northeastern Calaveras County, was founded by William and Dan Carsner, two of the thirteen Carsner boys who had all ventured to California with the dream of striking it rich. It was simply named after the gulch where the brothers had found large gold nuggets imbedded in the sands.

Prior to the Carsner boys founding the area, it had been populated for approximately 500 to 1000 years by the Northern Miwok. When the gold seekers came in droves to the area, the game that had been hunted for centuries to feed the tribes virtually disappeared.

"There were many Indians around Sandy Gulch at the time (my mother was born)," wrote McMilltion, *"and my grandmother (Mary Eliza Dillon Greve) was scart to death of them."*

According to a cultural resources study conducted by Foothill Resources, *"by the 1890's the Miwok who had traditionally lived in Sandy Gulch moved to West Point, building their village on the site that is now occupied by West Point School."*

Water was supplied first to Sandy Gulch from the middle fork of the Mokelumne River through the Sandy Gulch ditch and later by the Kodish ditch, which was built by Mr. Kodish, one-time operator of a store in Sandy Gulch. The Kodish ditch was utilized for water use at higher grounds than could be reached by the Sandy Gulch ditch. However, since the Kodish ditch had a lower water right, it was abandoned at low seasons when water supply was not enough for both ditches.

It was rumored that in the center of town there stood a hangman's tree. The following is an excerpt from an article written by J. A. Smith about the tree:

"On one occasion several Mexicans attempted to rob Mrs. Kodish who was in her

home. A gardener ran to the store and gave the alarm. Several men went to her relief and in time to catch one of the culprits. He was taken to a large tree across from the store and a rope tied around his neck and he was pulled up but told he would be released if he named the others. He gave the names and a search immediately begun for them." (Another account of this incident told by Smith states that the Mexican was "strung up" multiple times before he told of his accomplices.) *"The local constable went to the old Grapevine bridge believing they would attempt to flee into Amador County. It was a dark night and long past midnight when a man approached the bridge on foot and lighted a cigarette. The constable called out to him asking who he was, when he received no response he shot and killed the Mexican who proved to be one of the gang."*

At its height, Sandy Gulch boasted a school, miners' cabins, stores, saloon/town hall, shoe shop, and even a china shop. Following the decline of placer mining, quartz mining saw a rise in the Sandy Gulch area and the first stamp mill in the district was built.

By the early 1940s, the Associated Lumber and Box Company was built on the mountain top above Sandy Gulch under the supervision of Lawrence Wilsey; with the vision of a 'company camp' where the employees worked together, played and lived together and believed in a philosophy 'what is good for one of us, is good for all of us.' The company built homes for their employees with families and a boarding house for single men. They built a town hall, a general store, and provided utilities to their employees. Wilsey became a role model for many of the employees and was well liked by all. Soon, Paul LeTeer, the Sandy Gulch reporter for the 'Eagle' began sending his news items from 'Wilseyville'; a moniker that stuck.

Camanche Reservoir Towns

Lancha Plana, Poverty Bar, Limerick and Camanche all succumbed to a watery grave in 1963 when the Camanche Reservoir was created following the construction of the Camanche Dam on Mokelumne River by East Bay Municipal Utilities District (EBMUD).

Lancha Plana ***(Big Discovery Diggings)*** ***Marker No. 30***

Settled in 1848 by Mexicans, Lancha Plana held previous names of Sonora Bar and Big Discovery Diggings but was renamed after the flatboat ferry that crossed the Mokelumne River to Poverty Bar on the opposite bank. By 1858 the town's population was estimated to be 1,000. Just two short years later on March 3, 1860 the town began circulation of its own newspaper, the *Lancha Plana Dispatch*. By November of that same year the newspaper moved to Jackson, the Amador County seat, and was renamed the *Amador Dispatch*.

Once again, crime followed growth, as reported in the *Daily Alta California*, July 27, 1860:

"San Andreas, July 26, 1860—9 P.M., A fight occurred between a constable and his men, and some Indians near Lancha Plana, three miles from Campo Seco, in which the constable was killed and several others wounded; several Indians also were killed. Many were engaged on both sides. The constable was after stolen horses."

Lancha Plana made the headlines once again on July 11, 1902, in the *Amador Ledger* with a headline "*Lancha Plana Sensation: A Chapter of Violence Shakes the Little Burg—J.R. Blackman the Victim of a Serious Assault.*" The story tells of hydraulic mining done without permits, an elderly whistle blower, some alcohol and the ensuing battery of the whistle blower:

"On the evening in question, some of the guests (at the hotel dance party) managed to get liquor and became boisterous and quarrelsome. Blackman was seated in front of the hotel about ten o'clock and a personal encounter occurred between him and James Crail and Wilson Crail. Blackman was severely beaten and injured. He had a small cane in his hand, and this he used to defend himself as best he could. He has been confined to his bed ever since. He was in feeble health before the assault, and was only able to get around a short time before this occurred..." The Crails were held on \$50 bond each. One month later the case for Wilson Crail, which also included use of threatening language, was heard before Judge McCauley "with the result that the testimony was deemed insufficient to hold the accused, and he was discharged."

Poverty Bar

In 1855 teamsters held a meeting in Sacramento and created charges for hauling freight to what they termed the 'interior'. While the cost was often based on accessibility, heavy freight to Poverty Bar was at a cost of 3.5 cents per pound and light freight at 2.5 cents per pound. Within a few short years Poverty Bar was heralded by a few local newspapers as not only 'the' place to be, but a place where hundreds of dollars worth of gold could be found in your pan.

"In the riverbank just above Poverty Bar, dirt has been found that pays in places as high as \$300 to the pan. For several nights during this the owners of the claim slept by it, to guard it from light fingered gentry."—*Amador Ledger*, August 1858.

Quickly following on the heels of the Ledger article Poverty Bar was touted as 'the' place to be.

"Poverty Bar—Considerable excitement has prevailed for many months in reference to the diggings in this place and vicinity, and it now appears to be a fixed fact the Poverty Bar is to be the place in Calaveras County; every day adds to the stream of emigration, and this place is at present filled with persons of every trade, and avocation of life—indeed Poverty Bar is a moving, animated tableau, reflecting in a high degree the flush times of '49 and '50."

—*Mokelumne Chronicle*, October 1858.

By the end of 1858, Poverty Bar saw a new surge of employment opportunities as more and more excavations were underway as well as the fortune of having a greater water supply through new ditch construction.

Cat Camp

Near Poverty Bar there was rumored to be a small town by the name of Cat Camp with a population of approximately 300. Its discovery by a prospector is one of local folklore, retold in the Lodi Sentinel, June 1954: "...discovered by a prospector who camped there for the night. He was awakened by the cries of his cat, caught and killed by a wild animal. Next day, when he buried the cat, he turned up over \$100 worth of nuggets."

Limerick (Clays Bar)

There is little written of the town of Limerick, just a mention here or there and one letter to the editor of a newspaper with an invitation to

visit the town. Located south of the Mokelumne River in West Calaveras Limerick, also referred to as Clays Bar, was said to have been named for the many Irish immigrants who settled there. In a letter dated March 17, 1858, and reprinted November 11, 1937 in the *Calaveras Californian*, the unknown author wrote:

"Mr. Editor, Perhaps you don't know 'whar' Limerick is, if not, just come out of your kennel and place your delicate self in the charge of "Dick" and he will transport and transfer you at the Spring Valley House to "John" (Jehu of Dillon & Co's U.S. Mail Stage), who will land you safely at Poverty Bar one mile north of the City of Limerick. This is a lively little town with about 400 inhabitants. The mining at this place is very extensive and pays good wages. Last week I was out on the flat between his place and the river and I counted 44 sluice companies."

Whether the editor ever took advantage of the invitation or not is not known. However, just five days later the town carried news of those slightly less willing to work the many claims or those just down on their luck.

"New Dodge—A correspondent of the San Andres Independent, writing from Limerick Calaveras county, says: The 'sports' have adopted a new system of living when they are 'hard up;' it is by bumming around all night to save the rent of a bed, and sleep all day to save board."

Camanche (Limerick)

Marker No. 254:

Inscription: *"Named Camanche in 1849 after Camanche, Iowa. Once called Limerick. Peak population 1500. Rich mining at nearby Cat Camp, Poverty Bar, and Sand Hill. Mokelumne River water*

brought in by Lancha Plana and Poverty Bar ditch. Fire June 21, 1873 destroyed large Chinatown. Buhach manufactured on the nearby Hill Ranch."

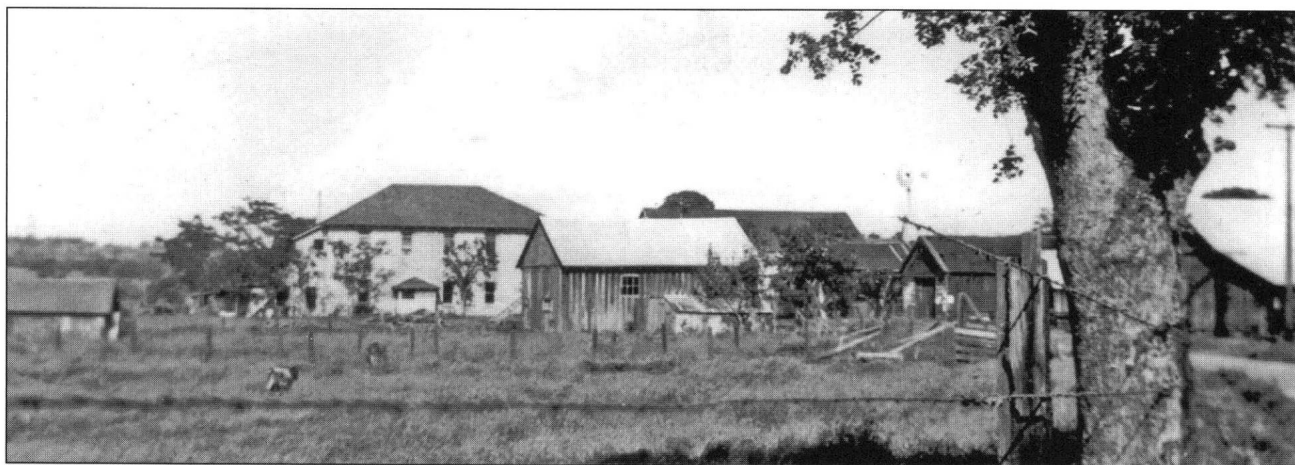
As gold mining became less and less profitable in Limerick, the Irish immigrants began to abandon the town moving on in search of greener pastures. In the 1860s, other settlers from Iowa moved to the site and named the town Camanche. While the marker states the name was changed from Limerick to Camanche as early as 1849, multiple newspapers reported stories from the town of Limerick as late as 1858 and research by local renowned historians place the name change in 1860.

Camanche continued to grow and a number of additional claims were struck with the access to water through extensions made by the Lancha Plana Ditch Company.

The successful Hill ranch was run by Mrs. E. A. Hill, who, on January 1, 1877 entered a partnership with G. N. Milco to cultivate a plant known as 'Milco's Universal Insect Exterminator' or Buhach (*Chrysanthemum Turreanum*).

Cave art was also found near Camanche during an early attempt to mine a cave. Now preserved and protected by EBMUD, the cave is believed to have been used by the Yokut. The cave holds cryptic pictographs created by either the Yokut or their ancestors between 500 and 700 years ago.

Prior to the inundation of the mining towns East Bay Municipal Utility District was tasked with the relocation of some 400 grave sites. The oldest known grave in Camanche being that of H. M. Rose, H. Williams and T. J. Briley. The three young men buried side by side with a common headstone, all passed between September 5th and 12th in 1852; cause of deaths unknown.



Calaveras County Historical Society

30 No. Main Street P.O. Box 721 San Andreas, CA 95249

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The Calaveras County Historical Society is a non-profit corporation. It meets on the fourth Thursday of each month in various communities throughout the County. Locations and scheduled programs are announced in advance. Some meetings include a dinner program, and visitors are always welcome.

The Society operates the Calaveras County Museum which is open daily from 10:00 to 4:00 in the historic County courthouse located at 30 Main Street in San Andreas; and the historic Red Barn Museum at 891 Mountain Ranch Road, also in San Andreas, which is open Thursday to Sunday, 10:00 to 4:00.

The Society's office is located in historic San Andreas, the Calaveras County seat. Visitors are always welcome to stop by the office for assistance with research, and are encouraged to visit the museums while in the area. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:00, and the telephone number is (209) 754-1058, or contact us at: CCHS@goldrush.com; Red Barn Museum (209) 754-0800.

April–June 2018

New Members:

Alan & Myra Brown—Angels Camp
Hubert & Ann Borchard—Valley Springs
(Gift Membership)
Patrick & Kathy Martin—Angels Camp
Tom Hunter—Novato (Lifetime Membership)
Art Flores—Los Angeles
Cheri Campbell-French—Angels Camp
James & Janet Respass—San Andreas
Larry Mersek & Susie Ryslinge—Mountain Ranch
Mike Cilenti—Valley Springs (converted to
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Donations:

The Pittsburgh Foundation on behalf of
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Gary D. Lowe—Book: From Nature by J. M.
Lapham, the Discovery and First Illustration of the
Giant Sequoia
Charles P. Maher—Cash donation
Wilma J. Hughes—1896 Calaveras County Map
Jack E. Houser, Jr.—Safety hard hats (2) and a
certificate belonging to Jesus Hernandez when he
worked at the Calaveras Cement Plant
Bill Gualdoni—Vise used by his grandfather in the
mines of Calaveras County
Ellington & Beatrice Peek—Cash donation
John Mac Pherson—Cash donation
Dana Dee Carragher—Cash donation