



Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society  
Volume XIX April 1971 Number 3

## CALAVERAS CAROUSEL

We have endeavored in the past to devote each issue of "Las Calaveras" to a special topic or purpose. But in so doing, we have accumulated a thick file of unused miscellany. And so we think it high time that we browsed through this file and shared some of its contents with our faithful readers.

Although we are not in a position to vouch for the accuracy of the historical details, the entertaining story of the great coon robbery in San Andreas easily finds its place at the beginning of our Calaveras Carousel. Member Getchell's style reminds us, more than a little, of that of a visitor to our fair county a century ago, one Sam Clemens by name. We trust that his historical accuracy is a little better than Sam's.

## The Great Coon Robbery

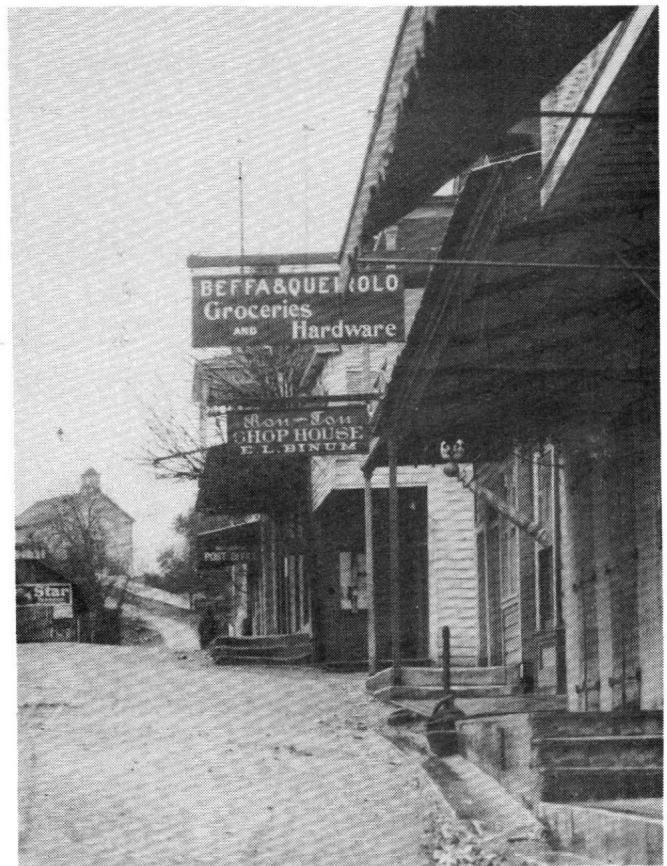
BY LAWRENCE H. GETCHELL

San Andreas, during the time of Hiram Johnson and the Bull Moose party, was mighty proud of its 700 inhabitants, give or take a few. As is want with a young generation growing up, the young bloods were constantly looking for excitement, the opportunities for such being sometimes difficult to find.

Wild game was still in fair abundance, and one weekend, a group of fellows organized a coon hunt. Having first talked it over with Lev Binum, who agreed that should the hunt prove a success, he would prepare them a coon feed they would long remember, the hunt was on. They long remembered, but for a variety of reasons not originally foreseen.

The hunt took place on schedule, and the hunters were successful in bagging a fine prime coon. Said coon, after proper dressing and handling to insure its tenderness and succulence, was turned over to Lev to prepare and roast to the epicurian expectations of the afore mentioned hunters.

Until now, everything had progressed smoothly, too smoothly, in fact. Word had leaked out of the impending party, and as I said before, opportunities for excitement didn't present themselves too often in San Andreas. A few "uninhibited laddies", while actually non-hunters, found their palates equally watering for a nice big piece of juicy roast coon. Now you must remember that the hunters had no reason to suspect any dirty work at the cross-roads, so while our Mr. Coon was merrily sizzling in the Bon Ton's oven, they (the hunters) journeyed across the street to Babe Raggio's drink emporium to whet their appetites in anticipation of the approaching banquet.



MAIN STREET, SAN ANDREAS

Lev Binum's Chop House, the Bon Ton, was between the Post Office and Tiscornia's Store. This view was after Beffa & Queirolo had taken over Tiscornia's.

---Photo by W. Covert Martin

This was just the moment the "dastardly members of the Uninhibited" had been waiting for. Now, it was common knowledge that Lev Binum, during the preparing of his cook-pots, often found the heat in the kitchen quite oppressive. This condition could and was usually alleviated by a quick trip to Tiscornia's grocery store and handy bar, just next door. Here, Lev could toss off a couple of quickies "neat" before you could spell coon, which is just what he did, while there was a break in the action. You guessed it; just the moment that our "uninhibited heroes" were waiting for. And between the cup and the lip and the across the street trip, they sneaked into the Bon Ton, removed the coon, baking pan and all, and were out the back door in a matter of minutes, taking a couple of Lev's towels in the bargain. They had even the temerity to filch a bowl of freshly-cooked cranberries.

Well, naturally, word of the "Great Coon Robbery" spread across the street to Babe's, where the confusion and excitement grew to unprintable epithets, as you can well imagine. Lev Binum, himself, was speechless as well as coonless. Our brave hunters were all for organizing a new Vigilante committee. A horrible crime had been committed, and, "by the Great Horn Spoon," the culprits would pay.

While all of this was going on, in another part of town our "Uninhibited heroes" were chuckling and carrying



LEV BINUM

Lev practiced his cook-pot arts for many years at the County Hospital before opening his Chop House downtown.

---Courtesy of Violet Morales

on with garrulous glee over their success. Their early foot in snatching the prize showed great ingenuity, but at that point the planning needed repairing because they had Mr. Coon in a most insecure place. In haste, they hid him as best they could, and then retired to a prepared meeting place for a caucus. Now our story might have ended right here, had our "Uninhibited heroes" been able to transport Mr. Coon safely to a secure location, post haste. Such was not to be.

It seems there was a Judas in their camp. Word of the hi-jacking, for reason never explained, reached the ears of some spoilers who were members of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. In a manner as mysterious as some of the mysteries of their order, and making full use of the information supplied them, they, in turn, made a snatch of the now, a most confused coon, and carried him to a safe place, deep in the confines of the new Lodge Hall.

Now, wouldn't you think that the second set of filchers would have sat down, relaxed, and enjoyed the results of their successful heist? Not so. Even though their thievery might by some have been considered more excusable than the first, which is perhaps what they did decide, being both decent and neighborly folk, they made out invitations (whether written or by personal courier is not recorded), and invited the members of both the "Original Hunters" and the "Uninhibited Heroes" to join them in a banquet of delicious baked coon as guests of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

Word of the second heist had by now been rumored about and the situation was beginning to show its humorous side. It wasn't long before reason triumphed, tempers cooled, and a banquet of Binum-baked coon was enjoyed by all, though in portions considerably smaller than originally planned. The merriment continued well into the morning hours.

## Thomas Campbell, Assemblyman - 1862

Over the past several years we have corresponded with persons, far and wide, who are interested in the history of our county. From far away Newfoundland came these clippings, sent by Mr. Harold Cody, a relative of Thomas Campbell.

**DEAD** --- Hon. T. Campbell, a member of the last legislature from Calaveras---he who impeached Judge Hardy---and a member-elect of the next, died of consumption at San Francisco yesterday. He was an able, energetic, determined young man---a native of St. Johns, Newfoundland, and from Massachusetts here. He was appointed Assessor of the Third Federal District of this State, embracing Calaveras, Tuolumne and other counties, but knowing that he was dying---that his days were numbered---and that he could scarcely live through the Winter, he resigned, choosing rather, if spared, to take his seat in the Assembly. It is probable that his remains may be brought here and interred in the State grounds.  
Sacramento Bee, December 31, 1862

### ILLUSTRIOUS DEAD

On a little eminence, a short distance inside, and directly opposite the main entrance to the (Sacramento) City Cemetery, is what is known as the State plot. . . In the southwestern corner of the State plot is a handsome marble monument over 20 feet in height, whose only inscription is that of "Campbell." It was erected by an act of the Legislature to the memory of Thomas Campbell, a member of the Assembly from Calaveras County, who died in San Francisco on the 30th day of December, 1862, at the early age of 25 years. He had served with distinction one term in the Assembly and had just been reelected a few weeks prior to his death. Eulogies were pronounced upon his death by Assemblymen Warwick, Barclay, Fitch, Wright and Ames. He was one of liberty's most eloquent champions, whose honesty was never questioned and whose character was without a blemish or stain. In his closing remarks, Thos. Fitch said: "But he is dead. The morning of his life flushed high with the promise of an effulgent day, suddenly put on his sable robes, and mantled together in their dark folds the promise and the prophesy. Alas for the young life so high with hope, so early gone hence. Alas for the mysterious workings of fate! Myriads of souls to-day bewail the messenger of death, while youth and talent go reluctantly to the grave. Many a gallant ship goes down with her burden of priceless treasure, while 'the rotten hulk lies rocking in sunlight of the beach.' The winter winds will sing among the fir trees of his home a dirge for their lost son. The Sierras will put on their priestly robes as before, and spring will come again; but we shall long remember how bright a star went out at twilight and how great a hope was riven by one blow of the hand Divine."

Sacramento Union, June 5, 1886

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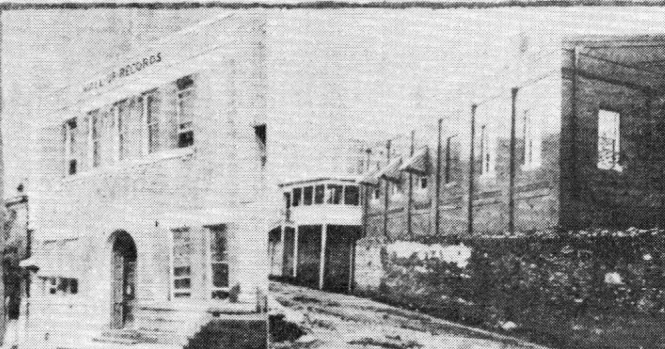
Until his recent death, Charles Schwoerer was the last surviving member of this group, taken the year after he was elected superintendent, from the Special Highway Edition of the Calaveras Prospect.



A. W. POE CLERK-AUDITOR-RECORDER	CHAS. F. SCHWOERER SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS	J. A. SMITH SUPERIOR JUDGE	JOE HUBERTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY	JOE E. ZWINGE SHERIFF
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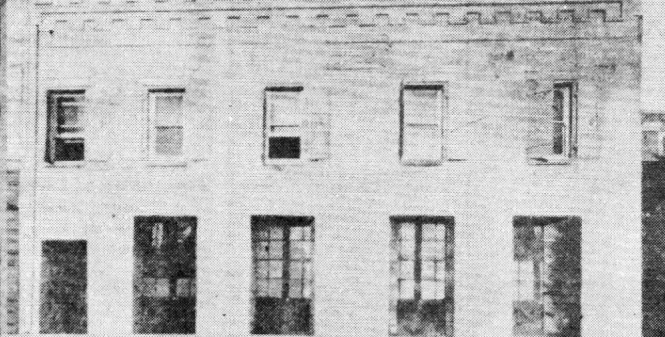
JOHN WATERS  
TREASURER



WM. M. NUNER  
ASSESSOR



DR. J. A. HOLLAND  
CORONER-PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR



WM. S. COULTER  
COUNTY SURVEYOR



WILLIAM B. GANN  
SUPERVISOR



THOS. W. TAYLOR  
SUPERVISOR



A. J. GIANELLI  
CHAIRMAN, SUPERVISORS



J. A. ROMAGGI  
SUPERVISOR



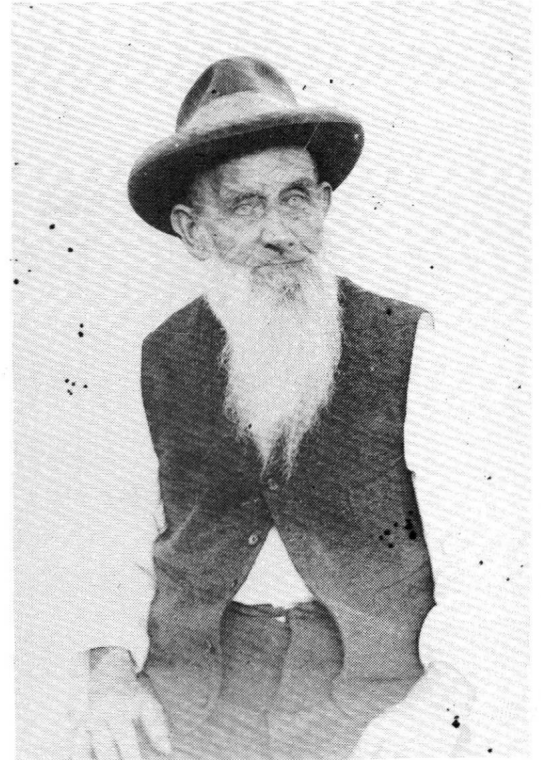
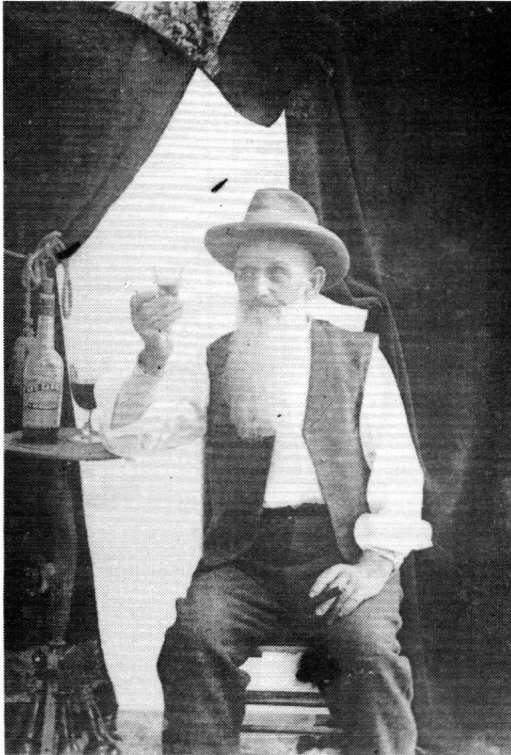
E. C. RIGNEY  
SUPERVISOR



**MOKELUMNE HILL  
CELESTIALS**

Photographed by Frank Peek at  
the turn of the century. Printed  
by Earle Edmiston from the ori-  
ginal glass plates.





#### A MOK HILL OLDTIMER

A Mok Hill Oldtimer sits for Frank Peek, about 1900. Judging from the pose, he takes his "Old Log Cabin" neat. The other view catches him in a more dignified manner.

Frank Wilson Peek (1881 - 1933) who as a boy in the days of glass plates was a shutter bug, be-

came one of General Electric's top engineers in the field of high voltage research. He was killed in 1933 when his automobile was struck by a train in Quebec, Canada. The original glass plates in the Frank Peek collection were recently given to the Society by Mr. and Mrs. Allen Peek.

### Back Issues Wanted

Starting with this issue, we will run advertisements for persons wishing to obtain back issues that are out of print. One of our members wishes to purchase a number of those listed below. Members that wish to help the Society may donate any of these issues, which will then be sold at \$1 each, for the benefit of the Society. Members wishing to sell any of these issues may run an advertisement. Issues presently out of print include:

Volume 1 Numbers 3 & 4; Volume 2 Numbers 1 & 3; Volume 3 Number 1 thru 4; Volume 4 Numbers 1, 2, & 3; Volume 5 Numbers 2, 3 & 4; Volume 6 Number 1; Volume 7 Number 2; Volume 8 Numbers 1 thru 4 and Volume 9 Numbers 2 and 3.

### New Members

Mr. and Mrs. Elton W. Dorroh, Angels Camp  
 Mr. and Mrs. Fred Harrington, Murphys  
 Mr. Emerson B. Herrick, Lodi  
 Mr. and Mrs. George H. Hill, Angels Camp  
 Mr. Pleasant H. Hill, III, Highland Park  
 Mr. I.S. Hoffman, White Pines  
 Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Lund, Menlo Park  
 Stuart Library of Western Americana, Stockton  
 Mr. George H. Treat, Long Beach  
 Mrs. Stafford L. Warren, Pacific Palisades

### Essay Contest

Winners of the 13th essay contest for Calaveras school children were as follows:

#### Elementary Division

- 1st - Hal Hansen, "Some Early Calaveras Diggings"
- 2nd - Kelly Comer, "Mother Lode Architecture"
- 3rd - Roni Anderson, "Francis P. Reister"

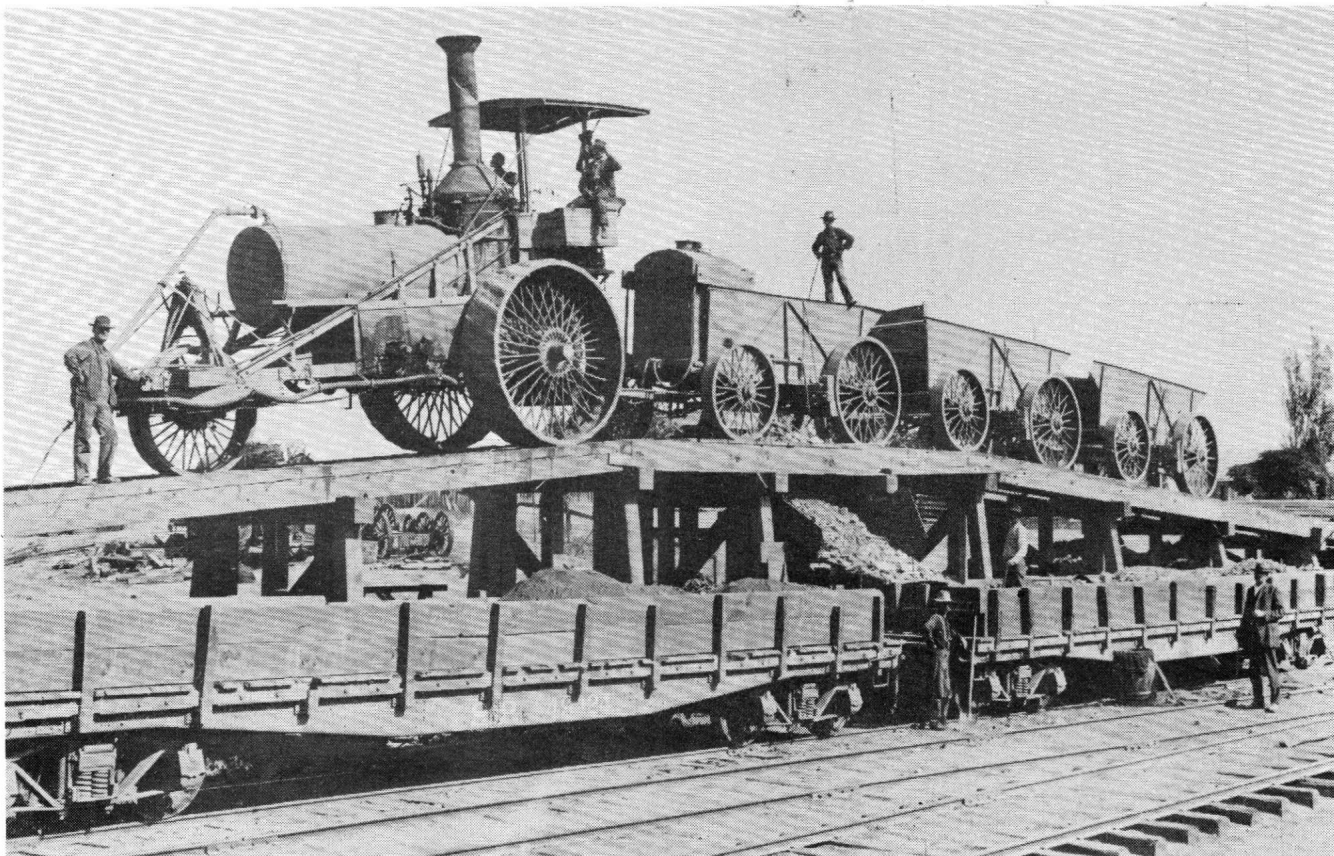
#### High School Division

- 1st - Kathy Quinones, "Purdyville"
- 2nd - Douglas Davis, "Vallecito Store"
- 3rd - Amy Hudson, "Alfred George Kirby"

### Agostini Building Restoration

On March 21st, the Directors of the Black Bart Inn voted to deed the building to the Historical Society, and directed their attorney to draw up the necessary papers.

**Invite A Friend To  
Join The Society**



### SHIPPING COPPER ORE AT MILTON

The railroad was built to Milton primarily to serve the Copperopolis mines. But the mines shut down before construction started. The railroad, however, reached Milton in 1871 and became the main entry into the county until the narrow gauge was built to Valley Springs in 1885. In '87 the mines at Copperopolis reopened, and a smelter was constructed, thus obviating the need of shipping the ore from

there. However, the smaller mines at Telegraph City could not afford to build their own smelter, and so continued shipping their ore and concentrates. This scene, in 1907, shows ore from the Napoleon or Star & Excelsior mines, brought down by steam traction engine, and being transhipped onto rail cars at Milton. This engine, built by Best at Stockton, was operated by the Valsen Brothers.

---From the Society's files.

### On The Ragged Edge

J.M. Shinn, of San Andreas, Deputy Sheriff and Jailor, was lately the hero of one of the most thrilling incidents we have ever been called upon to relate. It makes our reportorial blood tingle even now, as we recall the terrible circumstances connected with Mr. Shinn's miraculous escape from a horrible death, and it is with a shudder that we attempt their recital.

As before stated, Mr. Shinn is a Deputy Sheriff. Saturday morning last, he left San Andreas for Mokelumne Hill, driving a young, coal-black, spirited, powerful horse, attached to a sulky. Mr. Shinn rode reflectively along, experiencing nothing worth relating until he reached Donnallon's bridge across the Calaveras, about two and a half miles this side of San Andreas. The bridge is a fine structure, crossing the Calaveras at Bay State Rancho -- a single, light, airy span, thrown from bank to bank a sheer hundred feet above the tumultuous current below.

When just midway of the bridge the horse got frightened at a couple of birds that flew near him and became un-

manageable. The animal plunged and reared fearfully, threatening every moment to throw himself over the low, slight railing that borders the bridge into the rock-garnished depths below. Recognizing the imminence of his peril Mr. Shinn, with every nerve strung to its utmost tension, strove to control the frantic horse. Finding his efforts in that direction futile, he tried to urge the animal forward, applying the lash unsparingly, but without avail. Suddenly the maddened horse reared on his haunches and with a tremendous effort turned himself and the sulky completely around facing towards San Andreas. The sulky was thrown violently against the railing, demolishing it, and one of the wheels of the vehicle actually dropped off the side of the bridge.

Mr. Shinn's position was horrifying beyond the scope of language to depict. The violence of the shock threw Mr. Shinn from his seat, and as the sulky vibrated to and fro -- so evenly was it poised on the edge of the bridge-- Mr. Shinn, clinging to the vehicle with a vice-like grip,

was hanging head downward, while in the rugged canyon far below, the seething waters boiled, bubbled and leapt as if in eager anticipation of their prey. The imagination, however vivid, can have but a remote conception of the unutterable frightfulness of Mr. Shinn's position. Palsied with horror, momentarily expecting to be dashed to pieces upon the cruel rocks below, he still clung to his frail support with the tenacity of desperation, hoping that by some Providential intervention he might escape the horrible death that seemed inevitable.

Suddenly the frightened horse plunged madly forward, taking the sulky back on the bridge, Mr. Shinn clinging to the vehicle with so firm a grasp that he was thrown violently upon the planking ahead of the sulky, the wheels passing over him as the horse ran towards San Andreas. Mr. Shinn was so overcome with the terrible experiences he had gone through, that for a moment he could scarcely realize that the danger was past. He was also surprised to find--upon coming fairly to himself--that beyond a few slight bruises he was uninjured, certainly one of the most marvelous escapes from impending death we ever read or heard of. The horse and sulky reached San Andreas uninjured.

This exciting story was found by Ted Wurm in the January 11th, 1879 issue of the "Oakland Daily Times". It had originally been published a week earlier in the "Calaveras Chronicle" at Mokelumne Hill. Without wishing to detract from the reporter's lively description, we would like to point out that it was probably closer to ten feet than a hundred from Donnallon's bridge to the

"tumultuous current" below. And perhaps Mr. Shinn embellished his account a bit for the benefit of his listeners as he was relaxing in a nearby saloon afterwards. In any event, this is typical of "reportorial" writing of that era along the Mother Lode, and discovery of items such as this is one of the rewards for painstaking examination of musty newspaper files. We thank Member Wurm for sending it to us.

## Pardee Meeting

Partly because of an invitation from East Bay Water, and partly because of frequent requests from our out of county members for weekend activities, we are having a special Sunday picnic and meeting at the old Wildermuth House on May 23rd. East Bay Water is restoring this fine old stone residence, which is a substantial testimonial to their interest in our county's history.

An interesting program is being planned by George Poore and William Lange, and this occasion will be a splendid opportunity for our distant members to join us at this historic spot. Further details will be sent by mail.

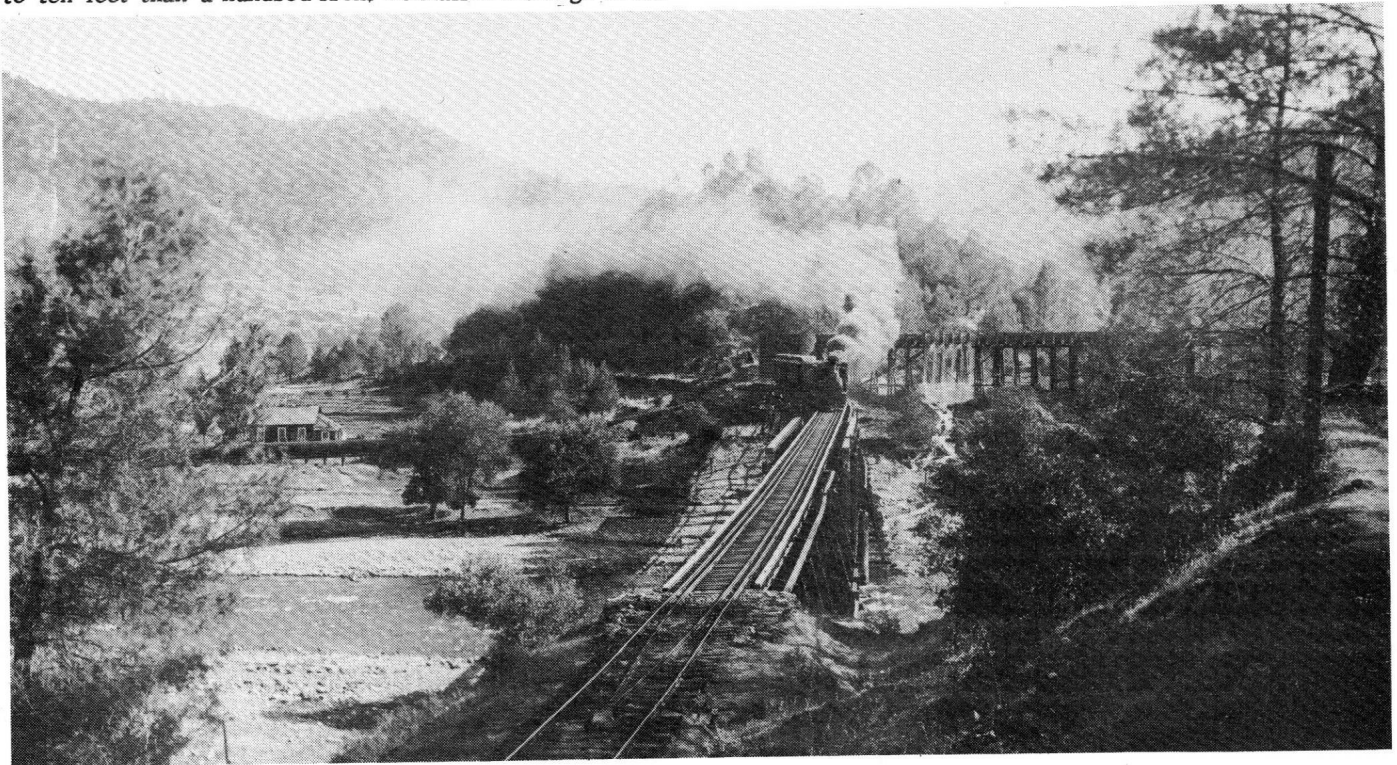
Other forthcoming meetings include:

APRIL 22nd -- Dinner at Friendship Hall, Angels Camp, Leonard Covello presents "Stockton in the Forties."

MAY 27th -- San Andreas - Reports on Historic Hotels and on Calaveras Families.

JUNE 24th -- San Andreas. Mr. Robin Lampson will be the speaker.

JULY 22nd -- Dinner and Annual Meeting, place to be announced.



MELONES TRESTLE

The fireman pours on the coal, and the engineer opens up the throttle wide as old No. 10 starts up the long grade to Jamestown. In a scant few

years more this area will be far beneath the waters of the new Melones Lake.

---From the Society's files.

# OFFICERS OF CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

San Andreas, California

## Charles Schwoerer

1887-1971

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Editor of Las Calaveras ..... W. P. Fuller, Jr., San Andreas

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Las Calaveras is published quarterly by the Calaveras County Historical Society. Individual memberships (\$4.00 a year), Family (\$6.00) and Junior memberships (\$1.00) include subscription to Las Calaveras. Non-members may obtain copies of Las Calaveras from the Secretary. The original historical material in this bulletin is not copyrighted and anyone is invited to use it. Mention of the source will be appreciated.

The Calaveras County Historical Society, a non-profit corporation, meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at the Grange Hall in San Andreas - except for dinner meetings which are held each quarter at different places in the county.

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## Editorial

With this issue we depart from tradition, not from choice but from necessity. As inflation pursues its relentless course and as costs mount ever higher, we are forced to go to a less expensive means of printing. Although we know that offset cannot match the quality of letter press printing, we will do all that we can to keep the format of "Las Calaveras" attractive and in keeping with past tradition.

When we assumed the editorship of "Las Calaveras" a few years ago, we stated in our first editorial that: "Local or community history is a perishable entity. If we don't chronicle this history faithfully, it soon becomes lost. Only fragmentary unrelated facts remain in the dark and dusty archives. Setting down our local history is a pleasant task that each of us can do, in the sphere of our own interest and knowledge. Too many of us, either because we feel unequal to the writing, because we are too busy with our daily living, or because we just think it should be left to George to do, never do record the data that goes to make up community history.

"One of the major purposes of the Calaveras County Historical Society is the chronicling of Calaveras history."

This issue, born of the contributions of some of those responding to that appeal, is a symbol of what can be done. But we don't have enough contributions, or comprehensive enough research. There is so much to set down, so much that is vanishing right before our eyes. I would like, again, to urge all our members, everywhere, to join us in the search, the research, and the compilation of our County history.

A charter member of the Society and, over the years, one of our most active and enthusiastic members, Charles Schwoerer died on February 3rd, at the age of 83.

Charlie had an encyclopaedic memory of local historic lore. Although he put far too little of this down on paper, we are fortunate to have the brief autobiographic sketch that we include below.

Mr. Schwoerer was always active in organizations, and was a member of the Calaveras Masonic Lodge No. 78, as well as other orders, and was very much in evidence at many of the community activities. He is survived by a daughter, Doris Mitchell of Santa Rosa; sisters Myrtle Brunner of Altaville, Rosella Charboneau of Los Angeles, Lillian Gilbeau of French Camp, Leoda Robin of Sacramento, and Hazel Bernasconi of San Andreas; a brother, Andrew, of Oakland, three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. His autobiography follows:

I was born at Murphys, December 18, 1887, the oldest of a family of nine--I had three brothers and five sisters. My father was Fred Schwoerer; my mother was the former Laura Inks. Their parents were among the first settlers in Murphys.

I attended the Murphys elementary school and graduated from the ninth grade. After leaving this school I got a job as mail carrier for the company making the surveys for the ditches and dams to provide water for the power plant to be built at Camp Nine on the Stanislaus. This ride was from Murphys to Kennedy Meadows on Sonora Pass in the summer. When they completed the surveys and established headquarters at Vallecito prior to starting construction, I resigned to enter the Western Normal at Stockton.

I attended the Western Normal for two years and then passed the Calaveras County Board of Education examination for a teacher's certificate in 1907.

My first school was in the Washington Flat district. The schoolhouse was located on the knoll just beyond the Richards' house on the grade road to Altaville. I stayed there for three years.

In 1909 I was married to Myrtle Jones, a graduate of the Western Normal who was the primary teacher at Murphys. Three children, two girls and a boy, were born to us.

My next school was at Willow Creek, a one-teacher school just out of San Andreas on the highway to Angels. I was here one year when I was offered the teaching principalship of the Altaville School. At the end of the year, a vacancy occurred in the principalship of the Angels school and I was elected by the trustees to fill the vacancy.

The Angels school at that time had an enrollment of more than four hundred pupils. I had forty-eight in the 8th grade. There were nine teachers in the school, including myself. We had what we called the receiving class, which was one step below the first grade and all youngsters entering school for the first time started here. One can readily see what the average size of the classes was. My salary as principal the first year, as far as I can remember, was \$110 a month. The teachers received \$60 or \$65 per month. During the summer vacation I worked in the mines. While teaching I served a number of years on the County Board of Education.

In 1922 I was elected County Superintendent of Schools. I took office in January, 1923, and after serving for 32 years retired in 1955.