



## STORIES IN STONE PART IV

*by Charity Maness*

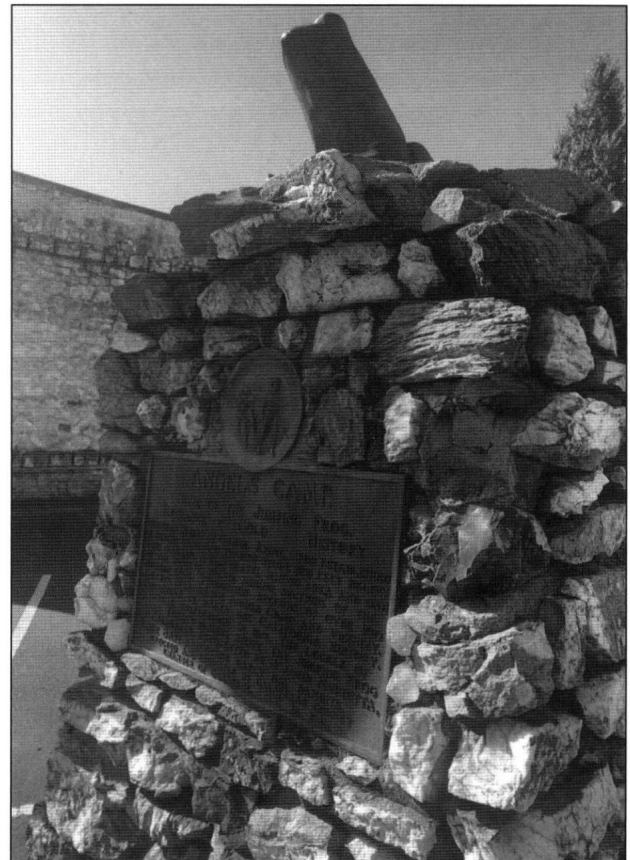
*This Las Calaveras edition of **Stories in Stone** continues the journey through the history of our amazing county via the many historical landmarks dotting our hills, valleys and towns. The history of each marker is but a tempting glimpse into the richer vein of the area's history.*

### **California Historical Marker 287 – Angels Camp**

The inscription on the Angels Camp historical marker, dedicated May 16, 1931 by the Calaveras County Chamber of Commerce, reads:

*“Angels Camp  
Home of the Jumping Frog  
Romance – Gold - History*

*Founded in 1849 by George Angel, who established a mining camp and trading store 200 feet below this marker. A rich gravel mining area and one of the richest quartz mining sections of the Mother Lode. Production records of over \$100 million for Angels Camp and vicinity. Prominent in early*



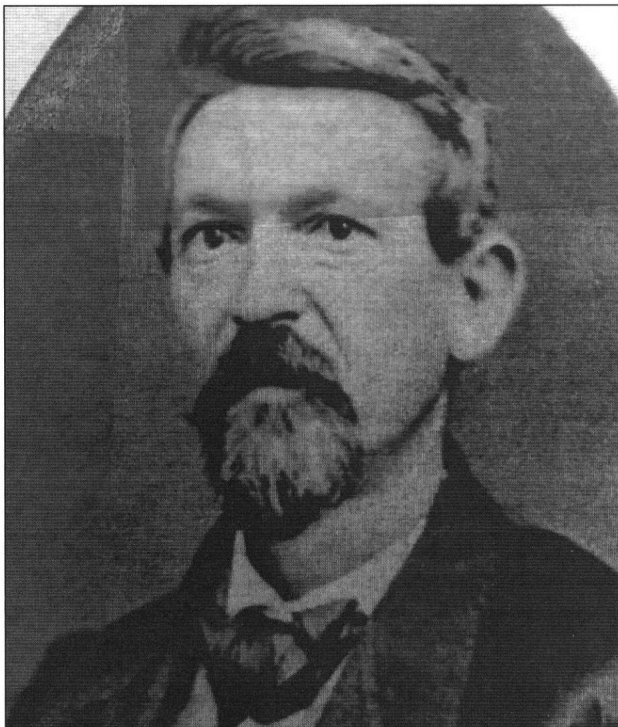
*Photo by Charity Maness – Angels Camp historical marker*

*day California history. Townsite established in 1873. Locale of Mark Twain's famous story, The Jumping Frog of Calaveras. Frequented by Joaquin Murietta, Black Bart and other early day bandits."*

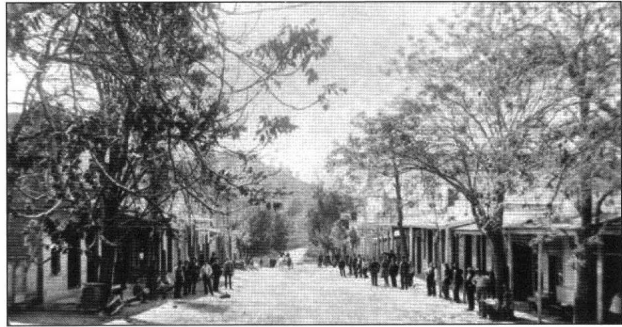
Though the marker states that the town was named after George Angel, many historical sites claim it was named after his brother Henry Angel, who operated an early trading post in the area.

Brothers George and Henry were born in Rhode Island. They came to California as soldiers serving under Fremont during the Mexican War. In May of 1848 the brothers joined the Carson-Robinson expedition to the goldfields. By September that year Henry was placer mining at the junction of Dry Creek and Angels Creek, yet by November he gave up mining due to illness and opened a trading post to serve the miners in the area. He was soon joined in the business venture by his brother George.

The little town boasted a population of approximately 300 by the time it received its name in 1849 and boasted a 'real' hotel by 1851; the Angels Hotel. Though originally a canvas structure, it was quickly replaced soon-thereafter with a wooden structure and once again in 1855 by



*Henry Angel, date unknown,  
courtesy Calaveras County Historical Society*



*Downtown Angels Camp circa 1890  
courtesy Calaveras County Historical Society.*

a stone structure. As the hotel was such a success, the owner, C. C. Lake, hired stonemason, Allen Taylor, to add another story in 1856.

The town began its mining history in placer mining yet by 1854 quartz mining was where the riches were being found.

As mining camps were wont to do, their populations rose and fell at the whim of mother nature unveiling her riches. Angels Camp was no exception to this mining ebb and flow.

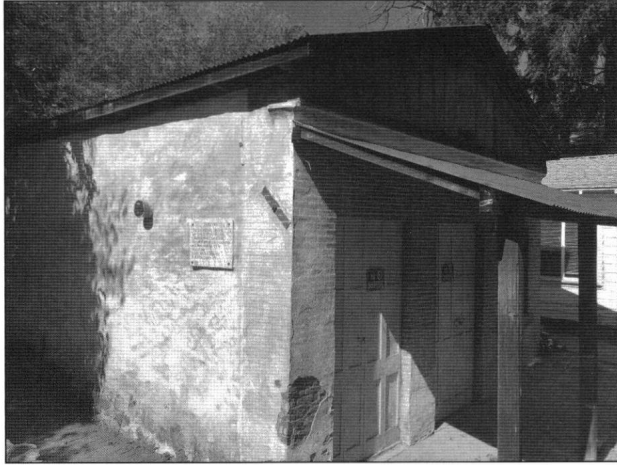
According to the 1850 United States census, Calaveras County had a population of approximately 16,884 – counting whites, free colored, domesticated Indians and foreign residents. By 1860 this number fell to 16,299 and by 1870, the number had almost halved to 8,805. Of that reduced population in 1870 the Angels Camp population was 1,748; 222 Chinese, 4 blacks and 3 domesticated Indians.

### ***Chinatown – E. Clampus Vitus historical marker***

Across from where the historical marker is located is Bird Way, once home to a thriving Chinatown known for its gambling dens, opium dens and red light district, as well as laundry and grocery businesses selling fresh homegrown produce.

By 1870 more than 20 lots in Chinatown were owned by Chinese, with prominent business owners being Sam Choy and Lien Sing.

The plaque on what remains of Sam Choy's building in Chinatown was dedicated September 20, 1980 by the Matuca Chapter of E. Clampus Vitus.



*Photo by Charity Maness – Sam Choy Store, Angels Camp*

The inscription reads:

*“This building, once owned by Sam Choy, is the only building remaining from a large Chinese settlement here in the early gold rush days. Now owned by the City of Angels Camp.”*

Sam Choy built his store in 1860 with motherlode brick; three sides being made from native schist stone.

Choy was considered to be the most prosperous of the local merchants as he owned not only the brick store but many gambling dens.

According to a 1982 nomination form for National Registry of Historic Places, Choy also “controlled groups of Chinese workers who were contracted to the mine owners, and he furnished them with food, clothing, lodging, tools and girls. He collected the pay from the contractor and controlled the finances of the coolies”.

Choy occupied this building until April 1892, when he sold it to Walter Tryon. From the 1930s through the 1950s the building was used as the Angels Camp Jail.

### ***Purdyville***

Snuggled within the town limits of Angels Camp lay a unique little suburb named Purdyville.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Purdyville, now a neighborhood off of Bret Harte Drive and Purdy Lane within the city of Angels Camp, was a town filled with miners, cat houses, saloons and large numbers of immigrant families. Today, all that remains are a few buildings, stories passed

down through generations and a small amount of written history.

According to ancestry records, Edward and Dora (Doris Hickman) Purdy once lived in the area with their two children: Emory, born in 1866, and Rose, born in 1868. Edward passed of apparent suicide in 1899 and Dora passed in 1933, leaving her property to her son Emory and grandson Victor Perino.

It is rumored that the miners used to call the area Purdyville and the moniker simply stuck.

Historical records show the Dead Horse Mine was once active on Stork Road, just a block off Main Street, not far from where the Serbian Church stands on Main Street in Angels Camp.

According to the Mining and Scientific Press edition for January through June of 1897, an article ran in the Angels Press regarding Dead Horse Mine. “Huston and Mercer have leased the Codrington Mine in Purdyville, formerly the Dead Horse, and have extended the tunnel about 20 feet. This tunnel was first opened in 1858, and is still in good condition.”

Why it was named Dead Horse Mine is a mystery. However, fifth generation resident Sam Marshall (born in a birthing house in Purdyville in 1938, yet passed away in 2017) was able to shine a little light on the subject from a 2016 interview in the Calaveras Enterprise. He claimed that just up the road now known as Bret Harte Road, there is a small hill that in the old days was known as Dead Horse Hill. While records don’t exist to say which had the name first, Marshall believes it was the hill.

“That hill, Dead Horse Hill, well, that’s where everyone would bury their horses,” said Marshall. He said it was not just horses that were laid to rest there.

*“One time there was an outbreak of hoof and mouth real bad. Well they had to bury cows, horses, deer, bear, all kinds. There were large burials all over. They learned real quick to bleed ‘em out cause they would explode if you didn’t. There were plenty of exploding gravesites for animals before they figured that out.”*

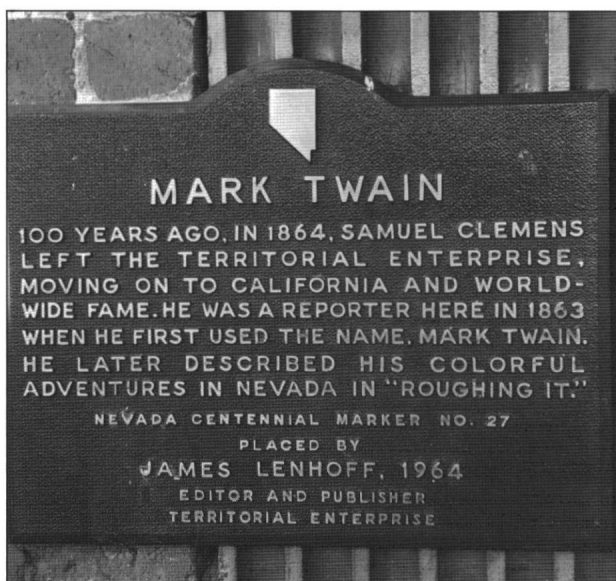
All that remains of Dead Horse Mine is backfill from multiple building projects within the area. And Dead Horse Hill is now covered in housing.

“My grandfather told me there were six cat houses and nine saloons in Purdyville. Most of ’em were canvas but they had wood floors. If you wanted a good time, everyone knew Purdyville was the place to go,” said Marshall.

Though things calmed down a bit by the time Marshall was born, he remembers a story of a man who had a tooth ache but who didn’t want to go to the dentist. “He walked into Jack’s (which is now Gold Digger’s Saloon – previously Claussen’s Corner - in downtown Angels Camp) and asked anyone if they had pliers. The bartender poured a little whiskey on the pliers and gave him a shot and the tooth was pulled. He shot 100 proof to dull the pain and to wash his mouth out. Jack’s was closed down a bit after that as there were too many fights.”

### ***Mark Twain’s ‘mark’ on Angels Camp***

Though Samuel Clemens tinkered with multiple apprenticeships throughout his young life he began his writing career in the early 1860’s, writing satire and humor with the Territorial Enterprise in Virginia City, Nevada. It was there that he used the pen name ‘Mark Twain’. It is rumored that he used his life experiences in Virginia City as a muse for his book ‘Roughing It’.



*Photo by Charity Maness – plaque on the Territorial Enterprise building in Virginia City*

According to a pamphlet written by Ivan Benson – one time Associate Professor of Journalism with the University of Southern California – Mark Twain was forced to leave Virginia City in May of 1864, preemptively avoiding potential arrest, after writing a piece in the Enterprise that “aroused the antagonism” of the editor of the competing news source, the Union.

In June that year he took a position as a reporter with the San Francisco Call but did not care for the more metropolitan journalism and left his position in October.

By December 1864, Twain traveled to Jackass Hill to reside with Jim Gillis, the brother of his friend Steve Gillis, a printer at the Enterprise. And in 1865 Mark Twain found his way to Angels Camp. Unbeknownst to the little town, this aspiring author would lead the town to fame.

Legend has it that while visiting the Angels Hotel from that cabin on Jackass Hill, Twain overheard a fantastical story of swindling, cheating and frog jumping, thereby creating a muse for his short story “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County”.

Yet in April of 1895, the Placer Herald ran a short piece on the ‘true’ author of that all American great story; Samuel Seabough.

The detailed article claims that Seabough wrote “...the “Jumping Frog of Calaveras” for the Independent, a paper published in Stockton California and the “Great North American Pie Biter” for the Chronicle, published in Angels Camp, Calaveras County. Mark Twain subsequently transferred them from their rural burial place to further publicity by means of the San Francisco Alta...a copy of the Stockton (cal) Independent for December 11, 1858, which published in San Andreas, Calaveras County... contains the original jumping frog story...written by Sam Seabough fully a year before Mark Twain blossomed as a humorist.”

Years after the stories became world renowned Sam Seabough, then Editor of the San Francisco Evening Bulletin, said, “it was true that he had originally written both stories for the papers named but that Mark Twain had taken them and made them humorous and famous” adding that he considered Twain to be the rightful owner at that point.





*Photo courtesy Calaveras Historical Society*

Regardless the ‘true’ author, Angels Camp embraced the legendary humorist with gusto and pride and in 1928 the creation of what is now known as the Calaveras County Fair and Frog Jumping Jubilee was born, complete with frog jumping contests.

A statue of Mark Twain was constructed by P.C. Manuelli, an Italian sculptor living in southern California, in connection with a movie made by Warner Brothers, “The Adventures of Mark Twain.” The statue was dedicated Sunday May 21, 1944 during the annual Jumping Frog Jubilee. Streets now herald his name and festivals carry his moniker where doppelgangers and storytellers abound.

Twain also left his mark in Angels Camp within the brotherhood of Freemasons.

Samuel Clemens began his Masonic career in December 1860, when he presented his petition to the Polar Star Lodge No. 79 of Saint Louis, Missouri; a lodge primarily comprised of River Pilots. Clemens, himself, was a steamboat pilot for many years. This vocation is where it is believed he picked up his moniker - Mark Twain – as it is a boatman’s call noting that the river was only two fathoms deep, the minimum depth for safe navigation.

He received the first degree on February 18, 1861. Yet shortly after being raised to Master Mason July that same year, Twain left for the Nevada Territory and fell away from the craft.

However, according to Mark Twain’s notebooks and journals, he had served as a junior Deacon in February 1865 in the Angels Camp Lodge.

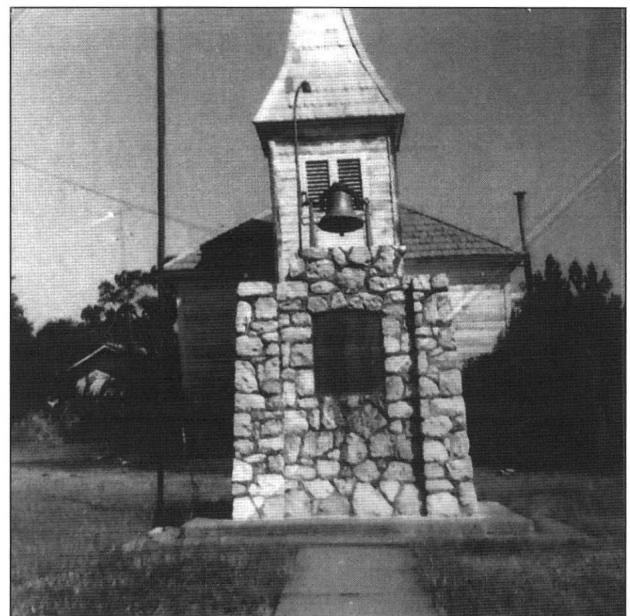
### ***California Historical Landmark 370 – Vallecito***

At the corner of Church Street and Cemetery Lane in Vallecito stands a historical monument with a bell adorning the top.

The monument was placed by the Native Sons of the Golden West in October 1939.

The inscription reads:

*“One of California’s important early day mining towns named by Mexicans meaning little valley. Gold was discovered here by the Murphy brothers in 1849. It was originally called Murphy’s Old Diggings. This bell was cast at Troy, N. Y. in 1853. After being brought around the horn, it was purchased from the ship with funds contributed by early day residents then brought to Vallecito and erected in a large oak tree in 1854. It was used to call the people together for all purposes until February 16, 1939 when a severe wind blew the old tree down.”*



*Vallecito historical monument and Union Church, 1965 courtesy Calaveras County Historical Society*

The bell atop the monument, according to some historical accounts, has a tarnished past.

Historians offer a number of conflicting accounts of the origins of the Vallecito bell, also called the miner's bell.

Vallecito, Spanish for "little valley," was originally named Murphy's Diggings by the Murphy brothers who first found gold in the valley in 1848. After they moved on to Murphys in 1850, Mexican miners settled into the valley and renamed it Vallecito.

By 1852, gold nuggets were being pulled from the ground at a rapid rate.

The town grew quickly with an approximate population of 4,000 by the end of 1852.

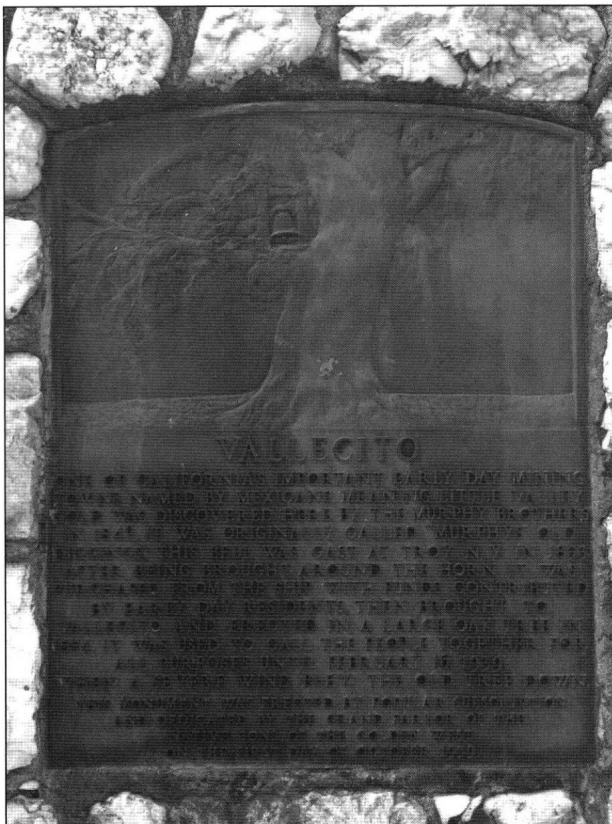
The bustling town had a Masonic Temple and Odd Fellows Hall and some 50 or more businesses that catered to the miners' needs.

During this time it was common for miners to pay for many purchases with gold dust. Since many newly opened businesses had no scales, they developed methods to measure payment that ranged from pinches of dust between the fingers to spoonfuls. It was rumored that the counters of those canvas-covered businesses were dusted with gold.

Vallecito made national news when The New York Times ran an article in 1853 that stated, in part, "Vallecito is now one of the most flourishing camps in the southern mines. The miners here are doing unusually well and some heavy strikes are being made daily. Mr. Isabell and company took from their claim, on Friday last, a piece of pure gold weighing 10 pounds and one-quarter ounces. Besides this, they picked up, as they have dug the ground during the last 10 days, over \$5,000 in beautiful specimens. This is no isolated case, but can be taken as an average of what the greater claims are paying."

With the town growing, residents needed a way to call meetings, warn of fires, call children to school or call impromptu outdoor Sunday Masses. The answer was a bell.

According to the historical information on the monument, the bell, cast in 1853 in Troy, N.Y., was brought around South America's Cape Horn by ship. And it is here that the story begins to unravel and travel a few different paths.



Vallecito marker detail courtesy  
[www.californiahistoricalandmarks.com](http://www.californiahistoricalandmarks.com)

The historical marker states the bell was purchased with funds contributed by early residents and erected in an old oak in 1854.

An account from "Legends of Calaveras County," a book held in the county archives, tells a story of the settling miners being "of a somewhat religious mind" and wishing to hold church. But they saw no sense in holding church without a bell to ring, as a bell would inspire other miners to attend. This group allegedly collected \$700 and elected a committee to travel to San Francisco to obtain a bell.

Once in San Francisco, the committee was not able to locate a bell for \$700.

*"The first place they could find to consult was a nearby saloon and after a good deal of consulting with the aid of the friendly bartender they found the answer to their problem. They didn't need a \$700 bell because they didn't have \$700 anymore. The bartender had it and he wasn't going to spend it on a bell."*

Without funds and feeling an urgency to return to their claims, the men snuck aboard one of the many vacant ships in the harbor and “stole a ship’s bell. This was returned to Vallecito where it was accepted in good faith” and was hung in an old oak.

Another version of history, which appeared in the Stockton Record on Aug. 11, 1928, is a tale about a crew with gold fever and a captain with a heart of gold.

After finally putting into harbor in San Francisco after a long trek around the horn, “Capt. Howard’s crew, learning of the ease at which gold was being won in the Sierra, promptly deserted and began a land-lubbery trek to the new El Dorado.”

With no crew, the captain soon followed suit, landing in Vallecito.

Hearing of the town’s plight, he sent a trusted emissary to San Francisco to retrieve his ship’s bell. The legend continues that Howard sold the bell to the town for a mere \$300.

Author Joseph Henry Jackson wrote of the Vallecito bell in his book, “Anybody’s Gold,” and claims to have climbed the tree himself and thus debunked the tale of a ship’s bell.

“It is not a ship’s bell at all,” he wrote. “Its size would make it out of place even on the Queen Mary. It was not rung by a lanyard made fast to the slapper; it is hung on a rocker arm as ship’s bells are not.” He wrote of the bell maker’s name cast into the metal as opposed to inscribed as further proof that it was not a ship’s bell.

Ship’s bell or not? Pilfered or purchased? Only those long gone know the truth.

After the great oak that held the bell was felled in February 1939 by a great storm, a monument was erected in its place before the abandoned saloon was turned into a church.

The Union Church, which still stands today, has the honor of the monument placed at its entrance, adorned by the legendary miner’s bell.

Information for this edition was gleaned from the Calaveras County Museum, [minedat.org](http://minedat.org), [scottishritenmj.org](http://scottishritenmj.org), Calaveras County Mines, multiple newspaper sources cited as well as news clippings and books found within the shelves and files of the Calaveras County Historical Society.

## *July – September 2019*

### **DONATIONS**

Callan Family Fund – Cash Donation

Margaret O’Drain – Pictures of Dorrington/ Camp Connell Cemetery, posterboard with photos, Ancestry.com listing of names for the archives in the Downtown Museum

Mary Matzek – diary of J.C. Hawver, Columbia Hill, Nevada Co., Cal. year 1876; collection of modern calendars, newspapers for the archives in the Downtown Museum

Gloria and Barbara Stewart – ‘The Skull’ yearbooks – Calaveras County High School – 1908, 1913, 1915, 1935, 1944 (x2), 1945, 1946 (x2), 1947 for the archives in the Downtown Museum

Mike Cilenti – Collection of books on the Mother Lode; family bible; National Geographic from 1913; war ration books; History of WW11 book; photograph, for the archives in the Downtown Museum

Aly McMullen – A washer/ringer from the 1850’s, which will be on display in the “wash room” at the Red Barn

Judy and Clyde Weddle – A lunch box used by Fred Zahniser at the Calaveras Cement Plant and “Memories and Reflection” written by Larry Allsman, with photos, to be displayed in the Cement Plant Exhibit in the Red Barn Museum

Mike Flock – 1837 Spinning Wheel (wood), to be displayed in the sewing and fiber area of the Downtown Museum

# 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 AM to 4:00 PM 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 AM to 4:00 PM.

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 AM to 4:00 PM, and the telephone number is (209) 754-1058, or contact us at: [CCHS@goldrush.com](mailto:CCHS@goldrush.com); Red Barn Museum (209) 754-0800.

*July – September 2019*

## NEW MEMBERS

Catherine Brady-Brown – San Andreas  
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