



## CALAVERITAS

By ELLEN THOMPSON

Nestled among the hills of Calaveras County and stretching along the banks of O'Neil or Calaveritas Creek is the little ghost town of Calaveritas. It was once a thriving mining camp. The name signifies "small skull." Originally there was Upper and Lower Calaveritas, about one mile apart, on Calaveritas Creek, five miles easterly of San Andreas.

The first location was made by Mexicans at Lower Calaveritas in 1849. Quite a settlement sprang up and the miners worked bars along Calaveritas Creek. In the fall of 1850 William Workman came from Angels Camp with an ox team on his way to Mokelumne Hill and camped for the night. True to the spirit of the period before breaking camp in the morning, he panned some of the gravel and was richly rewarded.

A town sprang up immediately. The Mexicans moved into the place and put up the first buildings. An old adobe building used as a trading post is still standing and now belongs to the Bacigalupi family. It was built by a Mexican by the name of Jesus Cervontis. The adobe was made in the gulch back of the DeMartini home, later known as the Penito home.

The second building to be erected was the John Sharp Store. John Sharp conducted a business here until the building was destroyed by fire, then sold the same to Louis Costa. Prior to the purchasing of the Sharp Store, Costa conducted a store business across the creek about where the Bacigalupi residence now stands. The Costa building is still in very good shape of repairs and is owned by Louis Costa, son of the early owner.

On May 25, 1858, a new school district had been granted. On April 15, 1859, the ladies of Calaveritas gave a Calico Ball at the Butts Hotel for the benefit of the school. This is the way the advertising read: "All persons friendly to the

cause of education are invited to attend. If any careless bachelor or ambitious young man in the district should willfully absent himself on the above evening, the ladies should hold a mass meeting and pass resolutions banishing him from the country." The ball was very largely attended and the sum netted for the school was over \$400. Over \$75 was realized from the grab bag. The first trustees were Messrs. Cap Thorp, John Sharp and Ed Purple. The teacher was D. K. Swim. There were thirty pupils and the salary was \$91.00 a month. The school house was located on the summit of the ridge beneath the spreading branches of a large pine.

Calaveritas was a flourishing place with a livery stable, a number of stores, two butcher shops, restaurants and fandango houses. It continued to grow until 1857 when it reached its greatest population of 700.

In 1858 a man by the name of Shelton lost his earnings in one of the gambling dens and in revenge set the town on fire, totally destroying it. A very small part of the town was rebuilt. Everything standing on the north side of the creek was destroyed. There was also a large Chinese population residing down the creek below the town.

Some of the early settlers were Mr. Costa, 1851; Mr. Bacigalupi, 1851; Mr. Trenque, 1859, and Mr. Cademartori, 1862. Judge Bodie was the first Justice of Peace. He lived on what is known as the Drury Place.

The first hydraulic claim in this area was operated by Mr. Burnham on the Dower Place where the cement quarry is now. The water for working the hill placers was obtained from the Ido and Terwilliger Ditch. The gulch leading to the Calaveritas Mine yielded \$500,000.

Mr. Burnham married one of the Reddick girls. She lived at Copperopolis until the age of 96.

At Lower Calaveritas a stockade was constructed in the very early days by planting posts in the ground close together. It is said this was for protection against officers seeking to arrest the bad characters that inhabited the place. It is not known how many murdered men were buried on the hill near Lower Calaveritas. The dagger and pistol

were the standing referee to pronounce judgment in all disputes. Joaquin Murietta spent a great deal of his time in the gambling and fandango places in Calaveritas.

The houses, now so few in number, arrange themselves along the bank as though they had come down to the creek to drink and either lost their way or felt that the hills were too steep to climb out again. There they lie, sole heirs of the heritage of the past.

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## CALAVERITAS

By JUDGE J. A. SMITH

This early-day, placer mining town of Calaveras County lies about five miles east of San Andreas, the county seat of the county on O'Neil's or Calaveritas Creek. The name signifies "small skull."

Originally there was Upper and Lower Calaveritas. The lower settlement was the older and was settled by Mexicans. In the fall of 1850, William Workman, of Angels Camp, discovered gold in a small gulch south of the present town, which he called Upper Calaveritas.

Miners soon moved into the community and it became populated by a motley group of gold seekers and they were richly rewarded for their labors.

The early inhabitants furnished a golden harvest for Joaquin Murietta and his gang when they had headquarters at Yaqui Camp, a short distance west of Calaveritas.

At the gambling tables its residents were the delight and easy prey of the professional gamblers, who had no other occupation than living off the hard-working miners.

Here at Calaveritas flourished the gambling houses, saloons, and fandango houses with their music and gay Senoritas who made life worth-while for the lonely miner.

It is said that the stranger never returned from a visit to Lower Calaveritas with its stockade built to keep out intruders. Many unmarked graves received the remains of some unfortunate person who died with his boots on.

Then amid this hectic life came the great fire of 1853 when hotels, stores, livery stables, offices, butcher shop, saloons, fandango and gambling houses were practically obliterated. Only a few adobe houses remained, which can still be seen.

Old claims were abandoned and miners went to new fields, where distance "lends enchantment." A second great fire burned the town down in 1856 and it was never rebuilt.

Water was brought to the community through the San Antone Ridge Ditch. New diggings were found and the town took on new life. The great placers just south of the town were worked by hydraulicking. After the hydraulics were silenced, there again appeared a period of inactivity. Then came the period of dredge mining and huge dredgers scooped from the creek bed, the precious gold that the miners were unable to recover.

Today the mines are quiet but the great trucks of the Calaveras Cement Company, loaded with limestone from the quarry northeast of the town, roar on toward Kentucky House, to the plant of the cement company.

A school was established in the spring of 1858, the district embracing Upper Calaveritas, Lower Calaveritas, Foreman's Ranch (Fourth Crossing), Old Gulch, San Antonio, and Indian Creek.

The old town of Calaveritas basks by the side of the

creek, its hills covered high with grape vines, rich in history and lore, waiting for the next turn of events that will return its prosperity.

The clink of gold at the gambling tables and the music and song of the fandango has long since died away. Law and order have overpowered the assassin's dynasty, virtue has triumphed over vice, and its handful of residents still dream of the golden harvest that awaits Calaveritas.

Briefly, this is the history of the place, and it has its parallel in every gold mining county in California.

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## CALAVERITAS AND THE DRURY RANCH

By ROSE JOSEPH

"Mother, could we hitch up old George, or old Tom, in the cart and go up to Grandma and Grandpa Drury's Ranch?" So Rudie, Tess and I hitched up old George, or old Tom in the cart, a two-wheeled vehicle, and took off. We loved to go at this time of year, the early summer, as there was so much to do, to see, and most of all to eat, such as cherries, plums, etc.

We would pass the Coogan and the Rainier places and then go around the Genochio place, now the Airola ranch; over the hills and down the rocky road where we would see Calaveritas.

We passed Costa's first. The house was located just as it is now. There was a store, or what had been a store just below the house, the ballroom where the famous Costa dances were held, was just below. What big times they had there!

This yearly event drew people from all over Calaveras County. The carriages and other vehicles were unhitched and the horses bedded for the night by a hostler. A delicious ravioli supper was served at midnight. There was an abundance of delicious food and the right drink to make everyone happy. At the crack of dawn the happy but tired dancers had their vehicles brought up and with their best beau driving—with one arm—they wended their way home.

As we went up to Grandma and Grandpa Drury's ranch we passed what is now the DeMartini place and forded the creek to the ranch. We had to open three gates. One of us would open the gate and the other would drive through.

First we went through the grain field and then we came to the second pasture with the orchard and the vineyard on the right. We then passed through two more gates and the sheep-fold, and then we passed the wagon shed and were at the Drury home. It was a long building—each room opening onto the porch. The winding stairs led to the second floor. The road to Old Gulch passed by the house and was on the level with the second floor.

Above and in back to the right of the home was a wine and winter fruit cellar. The apples were spread on the floor to keep them. The juice was kept as cider in the barrels below. The water in the reservoir to the right of the fruit cellar was used for irrigation. The water went underground 50 feet or so and came out emptying into a half barrel near the barn. The horses drank there. A ranch blacksmith shop was located to the right of the reservoir.

I thought it all very beautiful; the lovely large white oaks between the barn and the hillside, the reservoir, and the house. The water was used in the orchard and garden. The Calaveritas Creek separated the home property and the old

orchard. Across the creek was a swinging bridge. We liked the apples on the other side of the creek and as we had to "coon it" we didn't cross that particular bridge too often.

All of Nature's glory and the zest of it is no more as "Progress and Cement" has taken it all over.

## PONY EXPRESS

In 1858, a daily Pony Express was operated from San Andreas to Calaveritas and Old Gulch and on Saturdays extended on to Cave City, Mountain Ranch, and El Dorado Mills. The express left San Andreas immediately after the arrival of the Stockton Stage. Letters could be left at Sharp's Store, Calaveritas, or Osborne's Store, Old Gulch.

## WHEN UPPER CALAVERITAS WAS YOUNG - 1855-1856

Excerpts from Wade Hampton Johnston's Talks  
By MISS EFFIE ENFIELD JOHNSTON

The Yaqui Camp boys used to say: "Let's all go to Upper Calaveritas and watch Sam Seabaugh dance."

I don't see how Sam Seabaugh ever saved any money. He used to come down to Upper Calaveritas, and he would dance in the Fandango House from Saturday night until Monday morning.

He was one of the best writers in the State. He wrote some of his best pieces when he was about half full.

I saw Sam Seabaugh and another educated fellow do a foolish trick here in San Andreas. First one would stand up against the wall, and stretch out his neck while the other would see how close he could throw a bowie knife to his jugular vein without severing it. Then the other fellow would take his turn.

One time when the boys were in Upper Calaveritas, we saw a terrific fight, between two Mexican women at the Fandango House. First one, then the other, would have the best of it. The boys refused to interfere, finally one got the other by the hair, and was twisting her head down on the banister and she was taking aim behind her ear with a revolver, when one of the men present rushed in, threw up her arm and separated them just in time to save the woman's life.

William Paulbrite was laying there in Lower Calaveritas sick, with a bullet in his neck, when my Company bought the Yaqui Ditch for \$750 from the owners who were Maurice Murphy, Samuel S. Bacon and William Paulbrite.

What caused the trouble? Jess Miller had kicked and cuffed Harry Paulbrite, younger brother of William Paulbrite, around Upper Calaveritas and run him out of Calaveritas.

When he came down to Lower Calaveritas crying, and told his brother what Jess Miller had done to him, William Paulbrite just put on his six-shooter, and went right after Jess Miller.

They met in the Fandango House, both were ready. Both pulled at the same time. Paulbrite getting a bullet in the neck and Jess Miller was shot through the body and killed.

Harry Paulbrite was a kind of a drinking fellow, but William Paulbrite was a nice fellow. Just as soon as he got well, he went back home. He knew if he stayed around here, Jess Miller's band of desperados would get him.

Jess Miller belonged to a band of eight desperados, and they were some of the worst men that ever went through the county. Jess Miller seemed to be the king of the eight. They all met with the same fate but one.

I didn't know these fellows very well. They were fine looking fellows, and most all of them wore a Mexican sash (serape).

They were gamblers. I used to see them on the streets in San Andreas. They used to get up sham fights among themselves, just to draw outsiders into it. I saw them do this in Charles Favilles' saloon in San Andreas. Strangers who knew nothing about them, were very apt to get into it.

One of these fellows, John Chambers, stopped at our cabin twice. We didn't give him any encouragement. Billie Ellington, one of my mining partners, gambled. He was visiting him.

A Mexican boy, that was tending bar at El Dorado, killed two of these fellows at one lick. Brown, Chambers, and Marsh Nielson, got up a row with this barkeeper. Neilson and Brown were snapping pistols in his face. He drew his knife, and with almost one lick, an up and down stroke, he killed them both right there. Chambers was a coward. He retreated, not offering any more fight.

This boy was related to the Sevantes who lived on what was later the Antone Genochio place, and later the Jo Genochio place. We used to buy watermelons and tomatoes from Mrs Sevante. She had three daughters, Laura Trenque was one of them. I used to see this boy around there. He did a good deed, and it was well that he got away.

One of this band went by the name of "Kentuck." His right name was Alf Richardson. Old Mike Riorden, over on the South Fork, had his record. He said: "Kentuck" was one of the worst kind of men, right on the cut and shoot."

After three of these desperados got killed, they went single handed and scattered.

There were two Browns in the gang. One Brown (Sam) went to State Prison. He claimed that a Frank Ness of Upper Calaveritas swore falsely against him.

When he came back here from prison, he went into the Fandango House, at Upper Calaveritas and cowhided Ness.

This Brown was afterwards killed. He stole a horse, and was crossing the mountains. The owner followed him and shot him on the horse. After being shot, he called out: "You've got me! You dam s-- of a b----!" and fell to the ground dying.

The last I heard of Chambers, he had gone to Arizona. And he was the only one left of the eight desperados.

Old Jube Foster knew all of these fellows. He was tending bar at Upper Calaveritas at the time.

There was another bad egg around Upper Calaveritas called Bill Sands, but he didn't belong to the Jess Miller gang.

It was the gamblers that gave the Chinamen such a hold on the mines. They would go around where the miners were working, sit on the bank and talk to them. If the miners struck it, they would jump in and locate the extension and then sell out to Chinamen. These gamblers never worked.

I think, the first public ball that I attended in California was a Calico Ball, at Upper Calaveritas in 1858. I didn't dance at all. I had been playing for little dances and weddings, but I had not attended a public ball and took part in

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## OFFICERS OF CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The Calaveras County Historical Society meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at the Courthouse in San Andreas. Dinner meetings are held each quarter at different places in the county.

### EDITORIAL

The dinner meeting in the Mokelumne Hill Town Hall in January was one to be long remembered because of the vast quantities of good food provided by the ladies of the Community Club. A good attendance seemed to enjoy the pictures of California's Three Mothers.

Some people have predicted that the Historical Society will soon exhaust the material on the history of Calaveras County, but this has certainly not proved to be the case in the last two meetings. The February meeting brought out the interesting material on Calaveritas that is used in this issue of Las Calaveras, and the March meeting brought out some very interesting material on Paloma and the Gwin Mine. Mr. Jeffery Schweitzer, who is the curator of the Jackson Museum, gave a very interesting account of the operations of Gwin Mine. He claims to be the only person living who was ever in the mine.

The efforts and interest of many people were not adequate to save the old covered bridge at O'Brynes Ferry. Efforts to move it to a new location failed and part of the framework lies water-logged at the bottom of Tulloch Lake. However, the skill and thoughtfulness of Jack Bhends of Columbia State Park has provided us with a beautiful souvenir, a gavel made from the beams of the old bridge. A silver plate telling the significant facts about the bridge has been placed on the gavel. The gavel will be presented to the Calaveras County Historical Society by Mr. Bhends at the April meeting. He made a similar gift to the Tuolumne County Historical Society.

The Board of Directors of the Conference of California Historical Societies recently heard from Program Chairman Burr Belden on the plans for the annual meeting of the Conference at Hoberg's Resort in Lake County on June 26, 27 and 28. Our Calaveras Society should be represented by more than the usual three or four. The lovely setting on Clear Lake and the fine program will make anyone a fine vacation. Put the date on your calendar and attend if possible. You'll come back with a whole hat full of new ideas.

Have you heard enough about floods? Here is an interesting item from the History of San Joaquin County by Thompson and West, 1879. "The Mokelko Indians have an interesting legend about a great flood on the Mokelumne River. It is said that a great flood once filled the valley of the Mokelumne River from bluff to bluff and overflowed at a point near the Poland House, at the rancheria on the Megorle Ranch, and below Staple's Ferry (Lockeford). The water was so high that it ran in the direction of Stockton. Many thousands of Indians were drowned. Maximo, the old Mokelko Chief, says it occurred about five years before he was born; this would fix the date at about 1805 or 1810."

These are interesting comparative population figures from the U. S. Census.

Calaveras 1850, 16,884; 1860, 16,299; 1870, 8,895; 1880, 8,980—Amador, 1850.....; 1860, 10,930; 1870, 9,582; 1880, 1,-804 — Alpine, 1850 .....; 1860, .....; 1870, 685; 1880, 531; Tuolumne, 1850, 8,351; 1860, 16,229; 1870, 8,150; 1880, 7,843.

Taken from the Calaveras Chronicle, August 29, 1853: Keong Asking of Hong Kong was married to Miss Ahew of Tit Sing, Empire of China. (This ceremony was performed by the Honorable Henry Eno at Mokelumne Hill and was the first marriage celebrated in California between Celestials).

### EARLY MARRIAGE

On October 16, 1851, Arragalus A. French was united in marriage to Jane Gambol at Mokelumne Hill by Judge S. B. Ball. This is the first marriage legally solemnized in Mokelumne Hill.

### BRIDGE

In the fall of 1851 a permanent and substantial bridge was erected over the Mokelumne River at Middle Bar.

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the dance—I WASN'T IN SOCIETY THEN.

FOOTNOTE: From the Stockton Independent (Down the Decades) "A Calico Ball was given in Upper Calaveritas on Friday, March 12th, 1858, to provide funds for the school. The Committee of Arrangements were: Mrs. Burnham, Mrs. Allen, Mrs. Sharp and Mrs. Shannon. To the Calaveras County Historical Society, in care of Rose Joseph — This history of some of the "bad men" of Upper Calaveritas is just as my father, Wade Hampton Johnston, gave it to me, Effie E. Johnston, shortly before he died in 1927.