



Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society
Volume XXIV October 1975 Number 1

Bear Mountain Ranches

Undoubtedly, one of the best-known landmarks of lower Calaveras County is Bear Mountain. It is not just a mountain but a range of several parallel ridges with peaks reaching elevations of 2700 to 2800 feet. It is a large area, inaccessible, and often forbidding in appearance when viewed from the surrounding countryside. We are concerned here with Bear Mountain proper, lying north of Pool's Station and Hunt Road, and south of Calaveras River (Hogan Lake).

Although today few county residents and fewer tourists penetrate very far into the Bear Mountain fastness, this region has intrigued people and provided them a home ever since the days of the gold rush. In those faraway days, many hopeful feet tramped over Bear Mountain searching for gold or hunting for wild game.



SULLIVAN AND HIS HOGS

Henry Sullivan had many more hogs,
too, roaming over the Mountain.
Ranch Book

southern shore of the lake. We will first visit the DeMartini ranch at the north end of Weehawken Valley, then proceed east to the lower reaches of Vogelsang Creek. Then we will go up past the site of Petersburg (but on the south side of the river) to the junction where we will turn up the South Fork.

We will go by the old Fox place, and on up to Kentucky House (now part of the large cement works of the Flintkote Company) at the junction of Calaveritas Creek with the South Fork. Then we will go on up the South Fork by the Waters and Oneto places at the confluence of the San Antone and the South Fork. There we will leave the river and take the Pool Station road, crossing Steele and Bear Creeks. Many of the more successful of the Bear Mountain ranches were in this vicinity.

Just beyond Pool's Station, we will turn up the old stage road (now Hunt Road) toward the site of Carmen City, and thence along the eastern edge of Salt Spring Valley, and finally past "Lost City", the Gann Ranch, and back to our point of beginning.

We have assembled some information on certain of these early ranches and ranchers from various sources. "Las Calaveras" and "Ranch Book" have provided some of the data. Essays from our Society contests have been a very useful source. A number of those persons well versed in the lore of Bear Mountain have very kindly identified the sites of the old ranches and have told us about the Mountain. We show these sites on the map as closely as our information allows. There were, as we have said, many more homesteads, but we have shown only the better-known ones. We leave the south end of the range and the Salt Spring Valley area to subsequent issues. Now we start our trip with a visit to the DeMartini ranch.

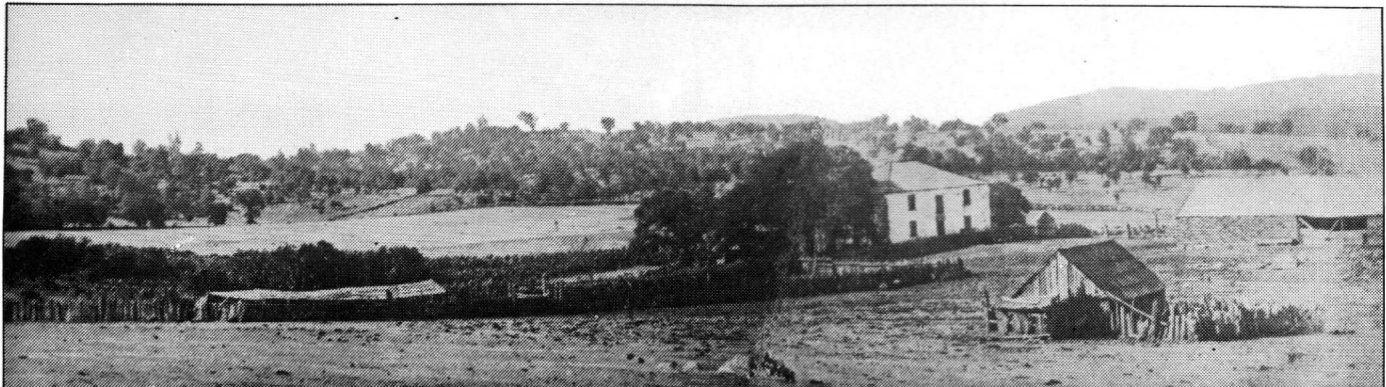
We come upon the old DeMartini home in Weehawken Valley at the western edge of Bear Mountain, a mile or more above the shores of the new Lake Hogan. The initial part of this substantial ranch house was built by Jacob Leoni in 1850. He was a Swiss emigrant, and shortly after establishing the Boston Ranch, as it was called, he was joined there by John Peter DeMartini, another Swiss. DeMartini later married Leoni's daughter, Catherine, and they eventually succeeded to the ownership of the property. Their



GIACOMO LEONI
1818-1896

daughter, Lucy (one of their seven children), married William Ellingwood. A very detailed description of the old Leoni-DeMartini home is contained in the excellent historical essay by Lucy's granddaughter, Helen Ellingwood (Third Essay Contest, published by the Society in 1959). The house is still occupied.

The Boston Ranch was well situated and, in addition to grain fields, supported a substantial orchard and vineyard and a large vegetable garden. Produce from the ranch was sold in Valley

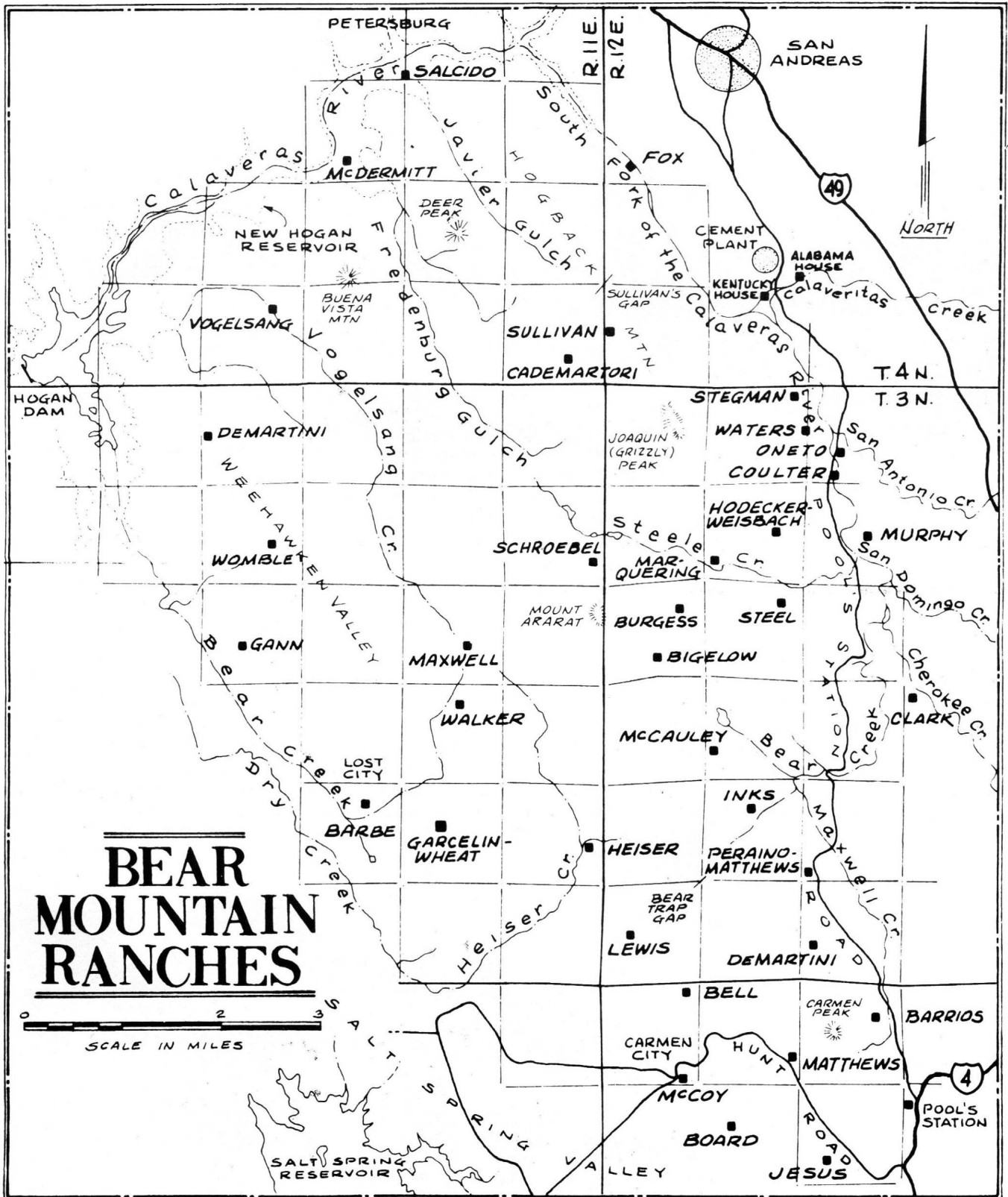


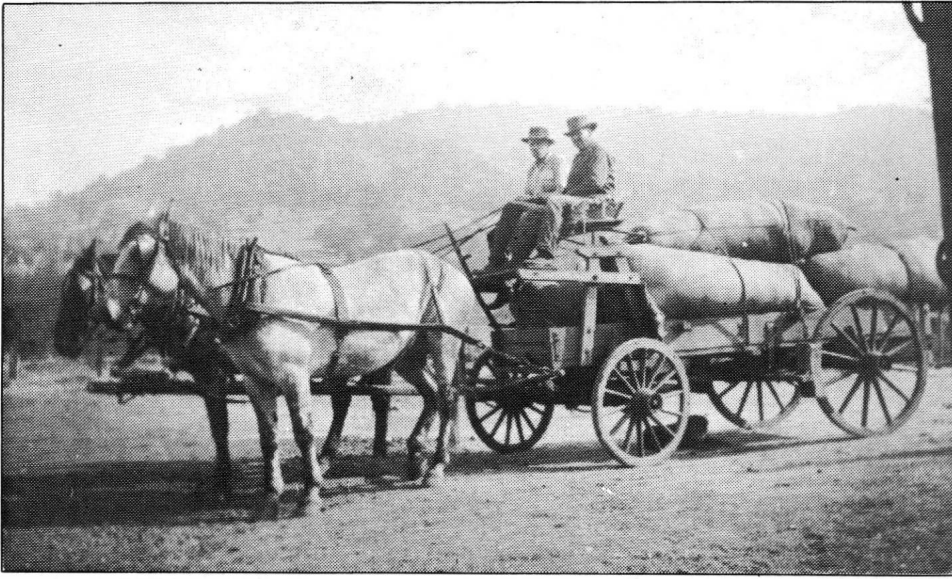
THE BOSTON RANCH

An old view of the ranch. First started by Giacomo Leoni, it was carried on by his son-in-law, John DeMar-

tini. Note the old stockade-type wooden fences.

Ranch Book





OFF TO MARKET

Gus Vogelsang and his hired hand take a load of wool (five sacks full) to market.

Mrs. Leona Sinclair

Springs and Mokelumne Hill. There is a family story, often recalled, that Joaquin Murietta, when visiting the ranch, barely escaped from the local sheriff. Another family tradition has it that Bret Harte visited the ranch and wrote a story about it.

When the old road from Valley Springs to Salt Spring Valley was used, the ranch served as a rest stop for the busy traffic on that route. There was considerable prospecting in the immediate vicinity during the copper boom of the 1860's and on one property close by, (the Caledonia), a 250-shaft was put down by the Silver Ram Gold, Silver and Copper Mining Company, but not enough ore was found for mining.

Just around the steep northern face of the western ridge of Bear Mountain, we come into the valley of Vogelsang Creek. Louis, one of the five Vogelsang brothers who grew up on the River, started ranching here first. Later, his brother Gustavus (and his wife, Kate White), came over and built the ranch house there. Their daughter, Leona, was raised at this home. Two others of the

Vogelsang brothers, Charles and Fred, lived in the area, while the fifth, Otto, moved to Stockton.

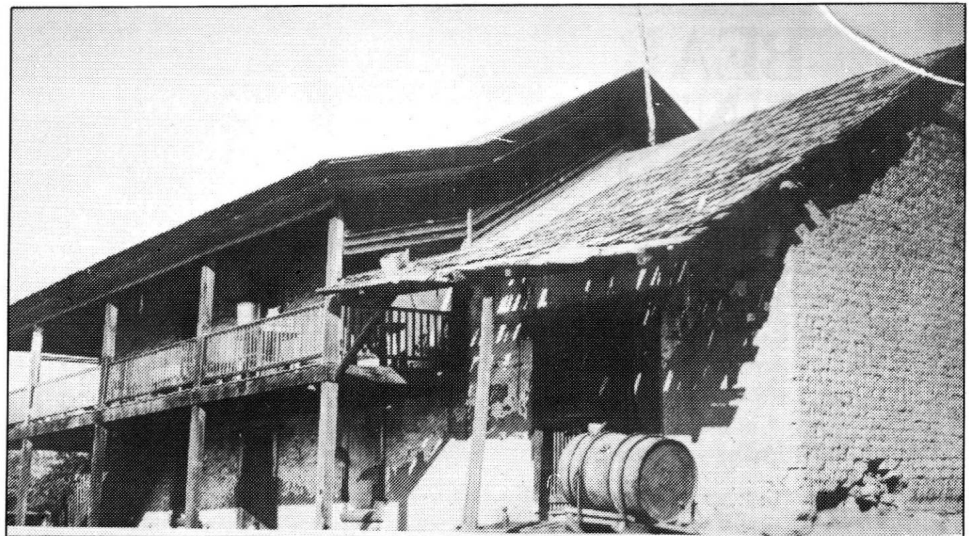
In the next little valley, just east of Buena Vista Mountain, where Fredenburg Gulch joins the Calaveras River, was the Jack McDermitt place. The gulch was named for Ralph Fredenburg who lived on the Mountain near the head of the gulch. As we proceed upstream, we come to Petersburg (that is, Petersburg's south side on the Bear Mountain side of the River). Although most of the community was on the north bank, there were several families on this side, including the Salcidos. Javier Salcido had a large home, and at one time he ran a butcher shop. The gulch that enters the Calaveras River valley at this point is named for Javier Salcido. At low water, a good ford across the River united the two parts of Petersburg. In the winter, when the water was high, foot traffic crossed on the suspension bridge.

The Calaveras River contained rich gold placers from the Hogan damsite on upstream, and many placer miners worked

THE SALCIDO HOME

One of the larger homes in the area, it succumbed to modern progress when the first Hogan Dam was built. Javier Salcido ran a little butcher shop in the ell at the right of the picture. This view was taken in 1929.

Mrs. Eva Soracco

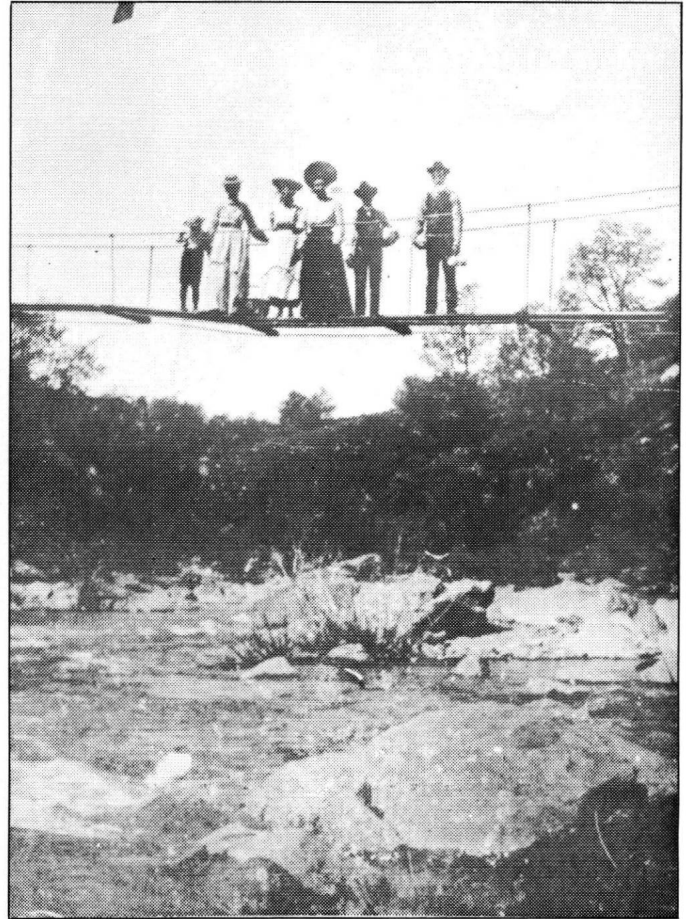


along this stretch of the River. Now this is all far under the waters of New Hogan Lake which backs up beyond the forks above Petersburg. The South Fork (and of course the North Fork, too) was rich in placer gold, and even after being extensively placed in early days, there were enough values left to justify dredging by "doodle-bug" or dragline dredges as recently as the 1930's. Wade Johnston, in his memoirs, describes some of the activity along the South Fork in the 1850's (see "Las Calaveras" for October, 1970 and July, 1971). As we proceed up the South Fork, we pass the old John Fox place. The Foxes were one of a number of families that lived along the River. Today, one is struck by a feeling of remoteness and abandonment as one walks up along the Fork. Traces of this historic past are now all but memories.

Somewhat farther up the Fork, we reach the Preston mining claims. Near here was another suspension bridge to provide a crossing over to the mine and to the trail leading up to Sullivan's Gap. The bold east face of the ridge, now known as Hogback, is steep, cliffy, and inhospitable. By taking the trail up through the gap, however, one finds a pleasant, fairly flat upland area west of the gap, called Moonshine Flat. It was here that Hnery Sullivan lived, where he eked out a living raising hogs, cattle, a few horses and by prospecting.

Henry Sullivan was born in Ireland in 1839, and died at San Andreas in 1920. He was a small, rugged and wiry man, and, according to Jim Waters, had a heart of gold. Jim's essay, in the Society's Eleventh Contest, published in 1967, gives an intimate picture of Sullivan and his home on the Mountain. Sullivan had come to America by way of Australia. He worked first at the New Almaden quicksilver mine before moving up to Calaveras County. Then he located a homestead of 43 acres up on Bear Mountain just west of the top of Hogback Ridge. Sullivan is rememberd particularly for his hogs. These would run all over the Mountain, and then would be rounded up once a year for shipment to market. Many of the creatures would never be caught, and for years "wild hog" hunting was an exciting but dangerous sport on the Mountain.

Henry Sullivan and a prospector named Bradshaw found and mined some gold placers high on the Mountain. Their formation at this elevation is still a mystery to geologists. Although there



PETERSBURG BRIDGE

A shaky footbridge was used for many years to cross the Calaveras River below the Forks. The Petersburg residents on the bridge in this view all have packages, and are probably on their way home after stopping at Mester's Store at North Branch.

Mr. William Ellingwood



SOUTH FORK BRIDGE

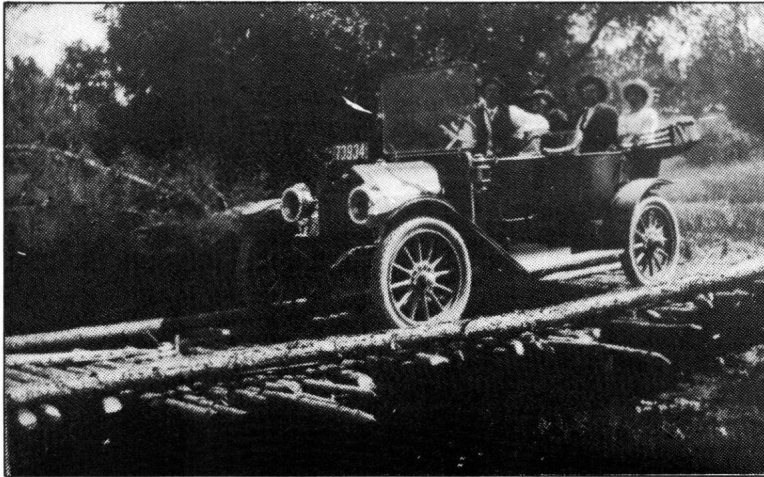
This was often called "the swinging bridge" for good reason. Lawrence Baggio and Louis DeMartini, Calaveras High students in the 20's, are helping it live up to its reputation.

L. H. Getchell

HENRY SULLIVAN'S CABIN

Here he poses with his prospector friend, R. S. Finley (left), at his little cabin near Sullivan's Gap.

Ranch Book



AN OVERLAND OUTING

An Overland, filled with Steeles and friends, gingerly crosses a bridge of sorts over lower Steele Creek. Operating an automobile around Bear Mountain in those days had its problems.

John Steele

RANCH ROADS

As roads on the Mountain went, this was a good one. Most parts of the area were and still are accessible only by foot, horseback, or four-wheel drive vehicles.

Mrs. Lola Christensen





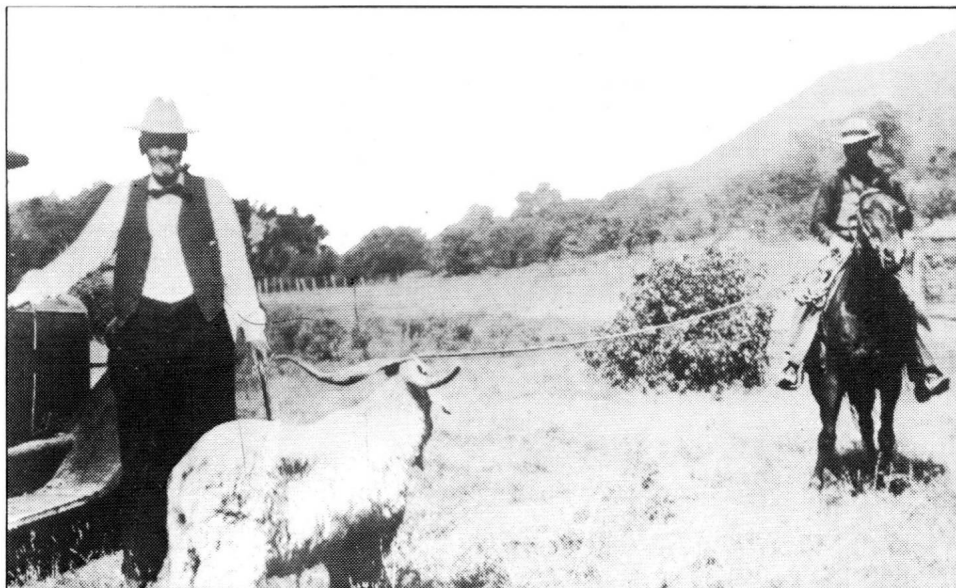
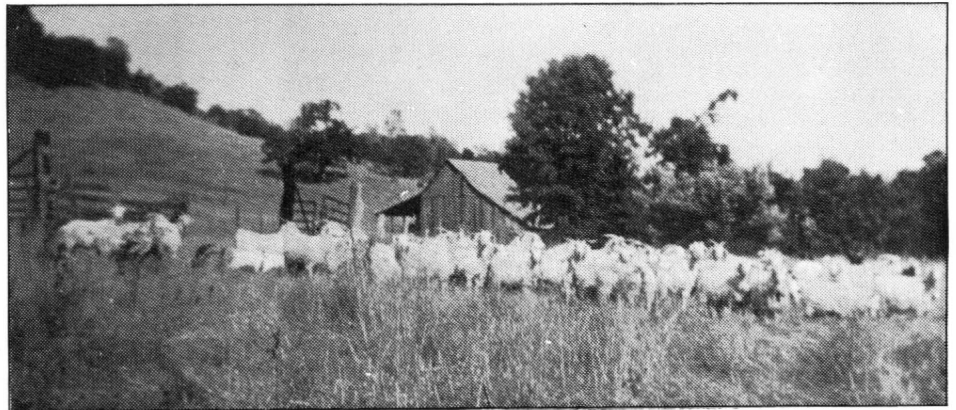
PLOWING ON BEAR MOUNTAIN

All available land that could be was tilled on Bear Mountain ranches. High on the Mountain Lee Schroebel plows

for his spring planting. This view was snapped in 1917.
John Steele

MARQUERING GOAT HERD

Bill Marquering had one of the last large herds of goats on the Mountain.
Henry Marquering



MARQUERING RANCH

Bill Marquering and his nephew round up one of the goats. From a snap taken in 1932.

Ranch Book

was extensive prospecting over the years on the Mountain, not only for gold, but for copper, chromite, and for manganese, the Sullivan-Bradshaw placers were one of the few deposits mined.

Returning to the River, we soon come to Kentucky House. In gold rush days, this was the center of the thriving placer mining activity in the vicinity. It was also on the main road from San Andreas to Fourth Crossing and Angels Camp. The road ran past Kentucky House, then up to Alabama House, about a quarter of a mile upstream on Calaveritas Creek (then called O'Neil's Creek). From there, the road went over the hill towards Fourth Crossing. Charles Henry Schroebel was one of the principals of Alabama House, which was a rest stop, hotel, store and butcher shop, catering to the many miners placering in the vicinity, and to the frequent travelers.

Proceeding up the South Fork from Kentucky House, we pass the site of the William Stegman home, originally purchased from the Macgruders. The Stegmans raised their family here. Just upstream from the Stegmans, we find the James Waters home, still standing. The descendents of pioneer-argonaut Waters still own the property. James Waters was a native of Ireland who came to California from Boston in 1851 by way of Cape Horn. He first mined at Yaqui Camp and then later moved to "Dry Creek" as this little community at the junction of the San Antone and the South Fork was then called. Waters married Hannah Griffin, also born in Ireland, and they raised four sons and two daughters at the ranch. James Waters died in 1926 at the age of 93. His grandson, James II, and greatgrandson, Jim, still run cattle on the property.

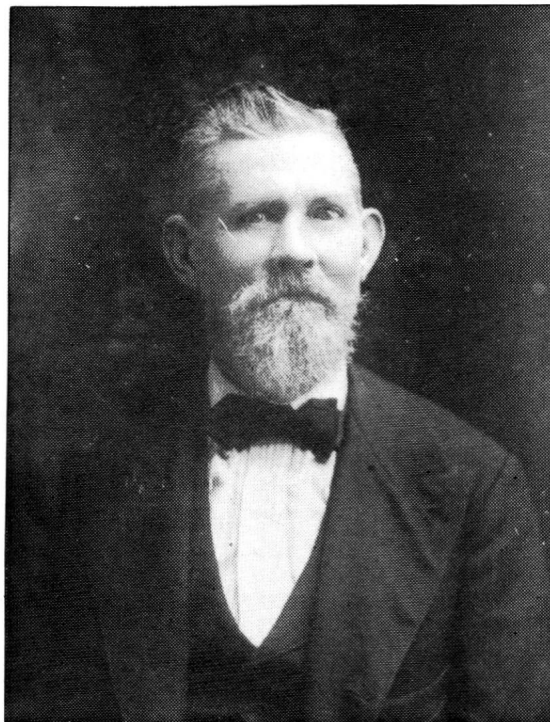
Lorenzo Oneto first established the Oneto ranch at Dry Creek. Later, his brother, Giovanni, bought him out and built the fine home still standing there and occupied by Oneto descendents.

At this point we turn onto the Pool Station road. Just beyond the bridge, near the River, on the left side of the road, lived Judge A. H. Coulter and his family. According to Wade Johnston, Judge Coulter crossed the plains dressed in a swallowtail coat. He was a mineral surveyor. The Coulters had two daughters and one son. The latter became a surveyor like his father, and was County Surveyor for a number of years.

Pool Station Road was one of the early stage roads, and was much traveled in the decades following the gold rush. It served as a very useful connecting road between San Andreas and Copperopolis as well as with the busy freighter routes from Milton via Salt Spring Valley to the Angels Camp area after the railroad reached Milton in 1871.

As we travel south on the old road, we approach the confluence of San Domingo Creek with the South Fork. The latter is known as Cherokee Creek above this junction. The Tom Murphy family lived close by this point. In later years, members of this family moved into the Ben Thorn house at San Andreas. On the west side of the old road, the Hodecker and Weisbach families lived up on the south slope of Grizzly Peak, or as it is now often called, Joaquin Peak. An Oneto descendant is living on this site today.

Joaquin Peak is said to be named for Joaquin Murietta who was reputed to have used the Bear Mountain fastness as a safe refuge in times of need. The earliest residents of this area (that is, before Joaquin's death in 1853), such as the Leoni-De Martinis, passed



JAMES WATERS

He was one of the argonauts who lived well into the Twentieth Century.

James Waters Family

down stories about Joaquin to their descendants. It is difficult today, however, to separate fact from fiction in these family legends.

Steele Creek flows down from Bear Mountain through a long, fertile and hospitable valley, and junctions with the South Fork just below the San Domingo confluence. It was in this valley, overlooked by Joaquin Peak and Mount Ararat, that were located the homes of several well-known families. These included the Marquerings, Schroebels, Steels and Burgesses. High up on the Mountain at the head of Steele Creek on Moonshine Flat, not far from Sullivan's, was the ranch of Louis Cademartori.

Among the ranches in the Steele Creek area is that settled by Henry W. Marquering and his wife, Frances Reinhard. They were married in San Andreas in 1861 and lived first in Altaville. Later they moved up to the homestead (160 acres) on Bear Mountain. Of the seven children born to the Marquerings, four have descendants. The eldest son, William, never married, but stayed on the ranch until his death in 1938.

Charles Henry Schroebel, from Alabama, was, as we said, interested in the Alabama House. About the time that the new road from San Andreas to Angels was completed in 1855 or so, by the construction of Scott's Grade into Willow Creek, much of the road traffic formerly passing Alabama House shifted over to the



WILLIAM MARQUERING

The last Marquering to operate the family ranch. Bill was proud of his vegetables. He was often called "Abe" because of his resemblance to our Civil War president.

Henry Marquering

new route. Shortly after this, Alabama House burned down, and Schroebel homesteaded high up on Bear Mountain, where he established an extensive and prosperous ranch. He raised a large family and there are many Schroebel descendants, some still living in the county. In 1940, Neal Christensen bought half of the ranch (the "widow's half" was purchased by Chester Tiscornia), and ran it for a quarter of a century as the last fully self-supporting ranch operation on the Mountain. Like most of the good ranch land there, it is still being used for raising cattle, but now by an out-of-county owner.

John Steel was one of the early homesteaders on Bear Mountain, locating his original ranch about 1861. An emigrant, he had crossed the plains in 1852 to Placerville, there marrying Josephine Hodecker. Four years later, he moved to Calaveras County to North Branch, and then up to his new ranch on the Mountain. He built up a large acreage by buying out other homesteaders (some of whom he had encouraged to file just for that purpose, as was the common practice in those days). A German, he anglicized his surname Stiehl to Steel, "just like the metal." Other members of the family have used an "e" on the name, and so the creek is spelled. John Steel became a successful cobbler in San Andreas, but retained the Bear Mountain ranch because, as he was wont to say, "I have a very expensive family."

("Las Calaveras," October, 1969). The ranch, some 2200 acres, was finally sold in 1915 to Panetto and Panera, and subsequently acquired by Chester Tiscornia.

South of the Schroebel and Marquering properties were the Burgess and Bigelow ranches. Much of this area has been subdivided into 20-acre "ranchettes", but as yet, there has been little homebuilding there. On the east side of the Pool Station road, just above the junction of Bear Creek with Cherokee Creek, was the Clark place.

Upstream on Bear Creek to the west we find the old McCauley ranch, now owned by George Stricker, and the Inks place, where John Abreu now lives. Just to the south, in the same valley, Maxwell Creek flows north to join Bear Creek. In this pretty valley, the road passes the old Peraino homestead, for many years the home of the Matthew and Sickles families, and later the Wards. This property has changed hands several times recently. Just to the south is the DeMartini home (relatives of the DeMartinis of Weehawken Valley), which became the Spring Hill Rest Home. At the extreme south end of this valley, just under Carmen Peak, was the Barrios ranch, now subdivided. This property adjoined the Andrew Pool ranch, described in the October, 1971, issue of "Las Calaveras".

What of the bears that must have roamed this mountainous region, and who lent their name to the Mountain? Some of these undoubtedly were of the small California Grizzly species (as witness the old name, Grizzly Peak, now Joaquin Peak). The last



THE RIFLE

This old rifle may be the very one that Jeff Gatewood used in the fatal duel with Dr. Goodwin in 1859 at Moonlight Flat. Captain Pope, Jeff's second, had brought it back from the Mexican War. It is now owned by Henry Marquering, who poses with it here.

Henry Marquering



STEELE RANCH

This was the second house on the Steel(e) ranch, constructed in 1910 after the original home burned. The Steeles salvaged a building in Mountain Ranch, mostly of redwood, for its construction. This house later burned, and a third was built by the Tiscornias. This also burned, and a fourth was then built on the same foundations.

John Steele



CHARLES HENRY SCHROEBEL

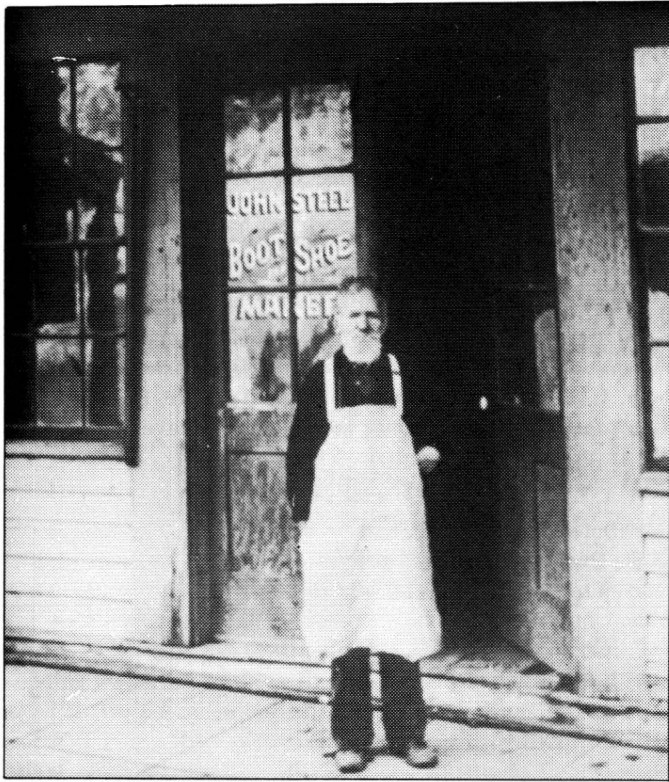
Beginning his career as an innkeeper and butcher during the gold rush, this hard-working argonaut became one of the more successful ranchers on Bear Mountain.

John W. Robie

“resident” bear was said to have been killed on the ridge just north of Carmen Peak, near the old trail across to Salt Spring Valley. This trail, which starts back of the Inks place, was well traveled in early days before wheeled-vehicles took over. The little pass through which the trail went was called Bear Trap Gap, recalling the capture of the last bear, and was used by horsemen and for cattle drives within the memory of people living in the area. Many hogs were raised on Bear Mountain, and some of these inherited the wild and unfrequented parts of the Mountain from the bears.

From Pool’s, we go south on the old stage road (now Highway 4) for a half-mile and turn up onto Hunt Road. This was the freighters’ route from Salt Spring Valley to Angels. Those teams coming up by the Red House (Captain Wright’s), or by the White House (Tower’s & Bixbee’s), would converge at Carmen City, and then come east up the grade to Pool’s. As we travel back westerly along this old freight road towards Salt Spring Valley, we pass the sites of the Jesus homestead on the left, and then the original Matthews place on the right (near the little airstrip), and then down the grade, past Shotgun Bend and on to the flat at “Carmen City.” The principal residents of this place for many years were the Doctor McCoy family (“Las Calaveras”, January, 1967). South of the “City” and on the lower slopes of the Mountain was the Board family homestead. North of Carmen City, the Bell family ranched in the little valley there.

In the little drainage next to the north of the Bell’s ranch, where the trail from Bear Trap Gap entered the valley, was the Lewis home. Northerly from here we come into Heiser Creek, where the Heiser family lived and ranched for many years. Northwest of Heiser Creek and on the edge of the broad and fertile valley was Jim Wheat’s ranch. This was established in the early 1850’s by Garcelin (or Gaslen) who planted a large peach orchard, and who at one time maintained a guest ranch there. The ranch was later sold to Thompson and Myers and was acquired from them by



COBBLER STEEL

**John Steel stands in front of his San Andreas shop.
Society Files**

James Wheat through a default on a mortgage. Northwest of the Wheat Ranch on another Bear Creek (this one flowing west and then north to the Calaveras River) is "Lost City", where the Frenchman, Barbe, lived, prospected, and ranched for a number of years (See "Las Calaveras" for July, 1961). The stone ruins of his buildings are a popular tourist attraction.

Higher up on the Mountain, on the upper reaches of this Bear Creek, we come upon the Walker family homestead. Even higher up, near the common sources of Bear, Heiser and Vogelsang creeks, and just west of Mount Ararat, was the old Maxwell ranch and home.

As we make our way northwesterly along Bear Creek down towards the Calaveras River, we pass the Gann ranch where some of the original buildings are still standing and where the abundance of spring water is very evident. Just over the low ridge to the east is Weehawken Valley, where J. T. Womble originally homesteaded. He later moved to the south end of Salt Spring Valley near Hodson. Then, at the lower end of Weehawken Valley, we come again to the DeMartini ranch where we started our tour.

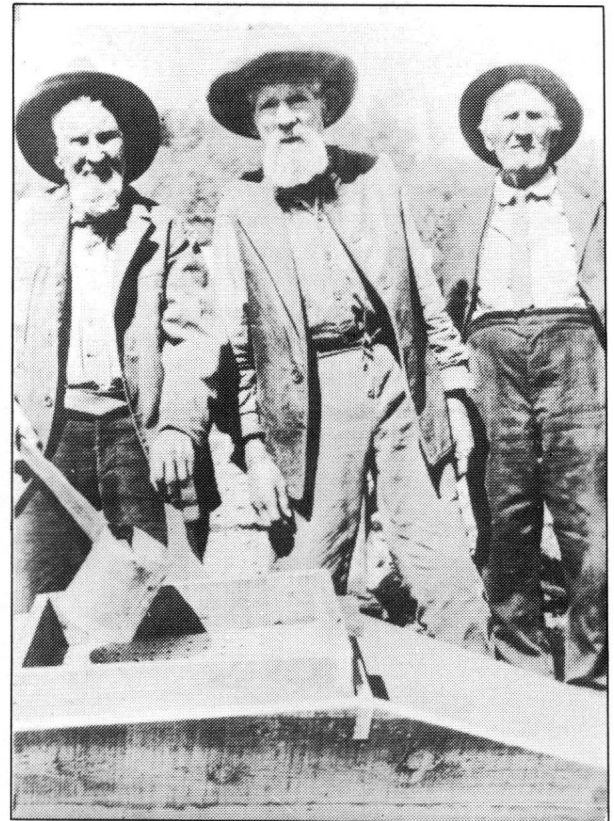
Today, the title to much of the better land on Bear Mountain has gravitated to large landowners such as Tiscornia Ranches, Inc., the Red House Ranch (William Ofenheim), and a number of out-

of-county ranch-minded persons. Some of the land is still owned by descendants of the original homesteaders, and some of the higher and least desirable land is still held directly by the Federal Bureau of Land Management. In recent years, a number of persons, both working and retired, have purchased smaller holdings for residences, especially along Pool Station Road. Most of the Mountain, however, remains much as it always was, and is frequented only by ranchers looking for strays, or by hunters and hikers.

Erratum

In our last issue, in spite of the editor's repeated efforts, Dinkey engine came out as Donkey engine. The difference is that the Dinkey has wheels and the Donkey doesn't, but is a stationary engine.

Copies of the Bear Mountain map, on a scale of one mile to the inch, are available gratis.



THE LAST THREE

These gold rush old-timers, all in their nineties, pose in the 1920's for a snapshot. Wade Johnston is on the left, then Jim Waters, and Louie Weisbach on the right.

Society Files

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Las Calaveras is published quarterly by the Calaveras County Historical Society. Individual memberships (\$5.00 a year). Family)\$7.00) 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.

Editorial

Too many people neglect to record names, places, and dates on the backs of their pictures. And we continually hear of pictures lost by house fires, thefts, or over-zealous house cleanings. If we have copies in our collection, the pictures will not be lost, but will be preserved for the enjoyment and study of all of us, and the generations following.

Volunteer "bibliographers" are needed to help us index our archives at 16 Main Street, San Andreas. Let Mrs. Ethel Dragomanovich know that you are interested in helping.

We are continuing to add some excellent historical pictures to our growing collection, and we urge our friends and members to help. If you do not wish to donate original pictures in your possession, loan them to the Society so that we may have them copied.

New Members

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CHRISTENSEN (SCHROEBEL) RANCH BUILDINGS