



Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society
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BLUE MOUNTAIN CITY

By JUDGE J. A. SMITH

Blue Mountain is a short mountain range lying entirely in Calaveras County. It extends in a general north and south direction about twelve miles southeast of the town of West Point and lies between the Middle and South Forks of the Mokelumne River.

At the base of the mountain on its western side flows the Licking Fork River, a tributary of the South Fork.

During the 1860's this section of the county had a mining excitement and prospectors came in great numbers. Many locations of mining claims were made. A trading center or community grew up that was called Blue Mountain City. This old town was located just a short distance west of the Licking Fork and was supplied with water from a large spring further up the hillside. At present it is difficult to even locate the site of the old town. Truly, it is a ghost town. Yet in the sixties it was a thriving community with all the business buildings usually found in a mining town.

The principal claim was called The Heckendorn Mine after its discoverer who at one time had a newspaper at Columbia, Tuolumne County, and later published the **BIG TREE BULLETIN** at the Calaveras Big Trees.

Considerable work was done on the Heckendorn Mine. It was equipped with an eighteen stamp mill in a circular battery. The title was eventually acquired by John Raggio and brothers.

The eighteen stamp mill was moved to the Champion Mine near West Point during the latter part of the last century. Later, two men from Angels Camp named Lavagnino worked the mine.

They opened the old works and were in the process of putting up a mill on the mine when an accident stopped their efforts. One of the men was on the roof of the mill placing shakes thereon and the other was engaged in falling a large tree that was obstructing their labor. The tree fell in a direction not intended and killed the man on the roof. This ended their development and the mine stood idle for many years thereafter.

Eventually, a man named Gardner secured the mine and he opened up some very good rock. However, the First World War caused the property to be closed and it has not been re-opened. The whole area was located at one time. Most of the locations were for silver. However, no silver of any consequence was ever found in the district.

The Good Hunter was the name of another claim upon which considerable work was done. The elder Rathgeb brothers, who later owned the Guttinger Ranch at San Andreas, did considerable work in the district and

Clampers Honor Archie Stevenot, "Mr. Mother Lode"

A short time ago our beloved Archie Stevenot was honored by being officially made "Mr. Mother Lode" by the action of the State Senate for his many years of dedicated work on behalf of the mining areas along the foothills of the Sierra. We all rejoiced at this justly deserved recognition. Since this event occurred, Archie has continued to pile up his wonderful record of service to his fellow man by work in the historical societies, Golden Chain Council of the Mother Lode and many others fine organizations. One of his most enthusiastic activities has been his efforts to organize and develop the ancient and honorable society of E. Clampus Vitus. It was largely through Archie's determined effort that the statewide Grand Council of E. C. V., Inc., was organized. This year at the Murphys meeting of the Grand Council, Archie was chosen Sublime Noble Grand Humbug. For his work on behalf of the Clampers and for the many years of service to his Mother Lode, the Matuca Chapter of E. C. V. on October 14th dedicated an historical plaque to Archie and his pioneer family at the site of the Stevenot homestead in Carson Hill. Few men have been so honored during their lifetime, but our inimitable and unexcelled "Archie" deserves this highest honor. All of us heartily agree with the fine editorial tribute in the October issue of **THE CLAMPER** written by Judge Smith. Archie, we salute you! May you and your sweet Rosie have many more years of happiness together in the service of your ever widening community.

located several claims.

Like all old mining districts, Blue Mountain had several periods of activity and then was quiescent for some time. People would just get up and leave everything and go away.

On one occasion the inhabitants left for the winter, but when they returned they found a man dead in a bed in one of the cabins. He was taken and buried just south of the old town.

When the Heckendorn Mine was worked the town made quite a growth. Apparently the town reached its greatest growth in the early sixties. A post office was established on August 19, 1863, and was discontinued on August 8, 1864. John Heckendorn was the Postmaster. The mail came from West Point to Blue Mountain City.

In the October 3, 1865, issue of the **SAN ANDREAS REGISTER** appears the following:

"Peter Davis, an old resident of Central Hill, favored us with a call a few days since and showed us some specimens of silver and copper ore which he had collected in his peregrinations through various parts of the county. Mr. Davis is the discoverer of the Good Hunter, Star of the West, Last Chance, and other valuable mines at Blue Mountain."

On June 3, 1865, the **CALAVERAS CHRONICLE**, published at Mokelumne Hill, carried the following article:

"A few months ago when the silver mania was at its height good ledges were found on this side of the Sierras at Blue Mountain. A few miners discovered silver bearing rock on what they called the Heckendorn Ledge. Considerable work was done on the lode and a small mill erected on one of the forks of the Mokelumne, but, owing to difficulties that were incidental to almost every mine operation at the time, little was done, and for almost a year past work has almost been entirely suspended.

"This spring the company commenced anew with favorable prospects of success. From some working assays made from the tailings, after roasting them, it is now found that the Henckendorn rock will pay over \$25.00 to the ton."

It is apparent that the Heckendorn Mine was reopened in the seventies as the CALAVERAS CHRONICLE of October 2, 1872, published the following news item:

"The Heckendorn 18-stamp mill is now in full operation crushing rich quartz, extracted from that lead. According to the assays recently made at San Francisco the quartz of that mine will pay from \$22 to \$250 per ton. The reports show the proportion of silver to gold to be seven to one.

"The work on the Imperatrice and Prince Imperial mines is also in progress and they have large quantities of ore ready for crushing."

Streets were laid out in Blue Mountain City in the early sixties. The principal streets were First and Second streets, Front and Gold streets.

Many corporations were formed to mine at Blue Mountain, among them were Heckendorn Gold and Silver Mg. Co., Hunter Gold and Silver Mg. Co., Barance Gold and Silver Mg. Co., Mt. Crest Gold and Silver Mg. Co., Oro Plata Mg. Co., West Point and Blue Mountain Mining and Milling Co., Star of the West Gold and Silver Mg. Co., San Andreas Silver Mining Co. Several of the corporations designated Blue Mountain City as their place of business.

Most of the mines were located on two ledges known as the French Company's Ledge and the Loyal League Ledge.

In 1863 J. Heckendorn, J. Smith, and E. R. Hess constituted the Board of Election for Blue Mountain Precinct and over 30 votes were cast.

In 1863 the CALAVERAS CHRONICLE carried the following ads:

"BLUE MOUNTAIN HOTEL
Blue Mountain City
Binet and Ekert Proprietors

The proprietors invite their friends and the traveling public generally to give their hotel a trial.

Their table will be supplied at all times with the best in the market served up in good style. The choicest Wines Liquors and Cigars can always be found at the bar.

Board and Lodging, per wk.	\$7.00
Board	6.00
Single meals	.50
Horses, per night	1.50

SILVER HOTEL
Second Street, Blue Mountain City

The undersigned take pleasure in announcing to the citizens of and visitors to the new silver mines of Blue Mountain, Calaveras County, that they have completed their new hotel, fitted and furnished it with a view of making their patrons comfortable during their stay in this beautiful mountain retreat. We ask the public to give us a trial, and we guarantee that our fare and prices will be such as to render satisfaction.

Board and Lodging, per week	\$8.00
Board	7.00
Single meals	50c
Beds	50c
Horses, per night	1.50

NYE AND VIDON, Proprietors"

The Heckendorn Mine was the only mine patented as a mining claim in the district.

When it was owned by the Raggio Brothers, John Raggio, Stockton banker, and his associates built a large lodge on the property and used it for many years as a summer retreat.

Mr. W. H. Gardner of West Point purchased the property and what development he did gave satisfactory promise of developing into a mine. However, World War I caused a suspension of work and nothing further has been done on the property.

ANDREW JACKSON (TRAPPER) SMITH

By JUDGE J. A. SMITH

Andrew Jackson Smith, a native of Indiana or Illinois, came to Sonora in the early mining days.

He decided to go into the mountains above Sonora on a trapping expedition. Here he met with but little success and only trapped a grey squirrel. As a result he was thereafter called "Trapper Smith."

He left Tuolumne County and came to the Big Trees in Calaveras County when that resort was being conducted by Sperry and Perry and entered their employ as a guide to tourists and thereafter Calaveras County was his home.

He was an expert angler and kept the tables at the Big Trees Hotel supplied with trout in season.

"Trapper" Smith was a tall, lean man and wore long whiskers. It was he that planted trout in Beaver Creek, a tributary to the North Fork of the Stanislaus River.

He caught the trout in the Little Mokelumne and carried them in two buckets to Beaver Creek to stock that stream. "Trapper" was a powerful man and an expert mower with a scythe. He mowed for early farmers in the Big Tree District.

He was a sincere man who took his citizenship seriously.

It is said that when he entered the voters' booth at the Big Tree precinct he removed his hat upon entering and remained bareheaded until after his ballot had been placed in the ballot box.

"Trapper" was never married

He took up a homestead in the South Grove of the Big Trees and used the trunk of one of the trees for his cabin. He remained in the trees until he secured a patent. Later, he had a cabin on Love Creek which, with its contents, was destroyed by fire. By reason of infirmities of old age he entered the Calaveras County hospital where he passed away and was buried in the hospital cemetery.

(These facts were given my by Ira Lester Flanders.)

Hydraulic Method Is Introduced in Mines

CALAVERAS, Sept. 10, 1853—A great improvement in gold mining operation is being demonstrated here. The plan has been adopted by Major Case on his claim on Stockton Hill, and found to be very effective as well as a great saving in labor and expense.

This method consists of the use of the hydraulic principle by which a powerful stream of water is brought by hose to bear on the bank of earth. Force of the water washes the earth away very rapidly. The debris then passes into the sluice where it undergoes the usual processing to recover the gold.

Major Case estimates his hose does the work of ten laborers. All work of moving heavy rocks is done away with as the water washes the dirt from around them, and they then roll out of the way and are so disposed of. Hydraulic will be especially useful on hillside claims.

SANDY GULCH

By JUDGE J. A. SMITH

Sandy Gulch is probably the oldest mining camp in the northeastern part of Calaveras County. It was discovered by Dan and William Casner. It is two to four miles south of West Point.

The gold in Sandy Gulch was large coarse gold and scattered about the sand of the gulch.

The stream itself runs in a general westerly direction and then turns sharply to the north and empties into the Middle Fork of the Mokelumne River.

At the head of Sandy Gulch two brothers, Charles and Allen Harris, located homes and farms. On the Allen Harris place was a sawmill and later a quartz mill where the miners had their quartz reduced. On the Charles Harris place was planted one of the early orchards in this part of Calaveras County. In addition to the orchard a nursery was established where most of the nursery stock was grown for that section of the county.

A school was established at an early date near what is commonly known as the Sign-boards, about two miles from West Point and now a short distance north of Wilseyville.

The miners, seeing the necessity of securing water for mining purposes, united and constructed a ditch from the Middle Fork of the Mokelumne River to Sandy Gulch. This water was used over a wide area on the ridge between the Middle Fork and South Fork of the Mokelumne River.

Later a second ditch was constructed known as the Kodish Ditch which brought water from a higher level and permitted higher ground to be reached with water than could be worked by the old Sandy Gulch Ditch.

The Kodish Ditch was built by a man named Kodish who at one time operated a store at Sandy Gulch. The Kodish Ditch had quite a large reservoir which was used in connection with it and located just a short distance north of the present Associated Sawmill at Wilseyville.

The Sandy Gulch Ditch was used at one time to develop power to operate the so-called Woodhouse Mine. This was one of the very early quartz mines worked extensively in Calaveras County.

Eventually, the Sandy Gulch Ditch was conveyed to the old Mokelumne Hill Canal Company and, after the transfer, the water was turned at Mayflower across the divide and into Licking Fork. From there it ran to the South Fork of the Mokelumne River and finally into the ditch of the company. Taking the water away from Sandy Gulch dried up the community and water for irrigating purposes has never been restored. This water right now belongs to the Calaveras Public Utility District and is used by the Mokelumne Hill and San Andreas communities. The upper end of the ditch is still in use.

The Kodish Ditch was a later water right and at low seasons there wasn't sufficient water to supply the two ditches and the Kodish Ditch was abandoned. On the Kodish Ditch at Mayflower there was a long flume and the body of Mr. Kodish was found in the flume. It was supposed that he had fallen accidentally into the flume and was drowned.

While Sandy Gulch at one time in its history could boast a school, residences, miners' cabins, stores, saloon and town hall, a shoe shop and even a china shop, scarcely any vestige of these early buildings remains.

Mr. Kodish, Mr. Musto, and a Mr. Herbert were the owners of stores at Sandy Gulch.

At one time the community was headquarters for a large number of "Digger" or Miwok Indians. They lived and had their round-house on the ridge just above the home of Allen Harris. The only Indian Cemetery still in use in the community is located on the old Peter Nelson place, now the property of Sharpneck.

The people of Sandy Gulch also established a cemetery at Sandy Gulch but it has not been used for burial purposes for many years.

Most of the early residents of Sandy Gulch were pioneers who made the arduous trek across the Sierra. They include the following families: Allen Harris, Charles Harris, James Porteous, Fred Greves, John Bardsley, Turner, Mercer, Del Rays, Bottonly, Bailey, Brown, Kodish, Herbert and Musto.

On one occasion several Mexicans attempted to rob Mrs. Kodish who was in her home. A gardener ran to the store and gave the alarm. Several men went to her relief and in time to catch one of the culprits. He was taken to a large tree across from the store and a rope tied around his neck and he was pulled up but told he would be released if he would name the others. He gave the names and a search was immediately begun for them. The local constable went to the old Grape-vine Bridge believing they would attempt to flee into Amador County. It was a dark night and long past midnight when a man approached the bridge on foot and lighted a cigarette. The constable called out to him asking who he was. When he received no response, he shot and killed the Mexican, who proved to be one of the gang.

A man named Homer Warren lived in Lower Sandy Gulch and in his later years raised and sold vegetables at West Point. He stuttered very badly and drank heavily. On one occasion, while he was peddling his vegetables, he became drunk and the boys at West Point changed the wheels on his vehicle and put the two rear wheels in front and the front wheels in the rear. He later claimed he drove up-hill all the way home.

Homer Warren was a direct descendant of General Joseph Warren of the American Army who fell in battle.

Recently the Associated Lumber Company erected their sawmill at Sandy Gulch and it gives employment to many men in the community and surrounding towns. They have a company town called Wilseyville and a post office by the same name.

The soil around Sandy Gulch is very fertile and if water can again be restored, it could be developed into a rich agricultural section of the county. Water is supplied to Wilseyville and the sawmill by the Calaveras Public Utility District from the old Sandy Gulch Ditch.

There were several quartz mines around Sandy Gulch of which the Woodhouse Mine was the most important.

Garter Gulch was another gulch mined extensively during the early history of Sandy Gulch.

A Mr. Stanley has a fine walnut grove at Sandy Gulch and adjoining it is a large area that has been planted to Christmas trees.

The oldest Congregational Church building in California is located at Mokelumne Hill, Calaveras County. It was built in 1856. There were earlier Congregational Churches established in California, but the Mokelumne Hill Church is the oldest building.

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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

With this issue of LAS CALAVERAS we begin Volume 10 of our quarterly bulletin. The first issue was published in October, 1952, as the HISTORICAL BULLETIN. As we enter this tenth year of dedicated effort on the part of many people in preserving the history of our area, we might take time to evaluate our accomplishments and point out our failures. The success of the BULLETIN, as we first called it, is largely due to the devoted effort and ability of our only President, Judge Smith. At least eighty per cent of the material in the publications was compiled and written by the Judge from his extensive knowledge of the history of the county. With his cooperation it has been easy for the editor to edit and arrange the material each quarter.

Although the material in LAS CALAVERAS has varied in interest and the size has fluctuated from four to twelve pages, the quarterly has never been late. This may seem to be a trivial matter but at times, with the press of other matters, it has been a real challenge to get the material to the printers on time to have it ready for our quarterly dinners. We should also give the printers, Jim Luly and the Calaveras Press, credit for cooperating with us in getting the publication out on time.

Although we have failed in our original plan, which was to put out from time to time special publications, we have preserved in the printed word of LAS CALAVERAS much of the history of our wonderful Calaveras County that would have otherwise been lost. Anyone who has a complete file of all the quarterly publications of LAS CALAVERAS can be sure that he has a valuable collection of Calaveras County history.

Congratulations to Louis Domenghini, of Mountain Ranch, for being elected to the Board of Directors. All other officers of the Society were re-elected at the September meeting.

Our treasurer, Mrs. Violet Cuslidge, wants to remind everyone that 1961-62 dues are now payable.

For those of you who enjoyed Mrs. Ella Cain's BODIE, which was issued a few years ago, we recommend her latest publication, THE STORY OF EARLY MONO COUNTY, published by the Fearon Press. If you would like an autographed copy, just address a request to her at Bridgeport, Calif., along with a check for \$3.90.

As Mrs. Hattie Hertzog, again chairman of the Essay Committee, starts the campaign to obtain the participation of the students of Calaveras County in the Essay Contest in Original History, may we urge the parents and teachers to give this project their enthusiastic support. This is one of the ways our younger generations can be trained to appreciate their rich American heritage. These essays also add to the total amount of Calaveras history that is being preserved, as the contest emphasizes original material not previously published.

MORE ON MONTE WOLFE

Dear Dr. Wood:

A friend of mine, Mrs. Jim Culbertson, gave me a copy of the CALAVERAS CALIFORNIAN, dated Feb. 9, 1961, with an interesting sketch of Monte Wolfe by Judge Smith. You mentioned that you were interested in the almost legendary character and I thought that perhaps I could add to the general confusion that seems to have grown up around him. Judge Smith states that he roamed the mountains for 20 years. I am sure that the time was much longer. When as a young man I used to drive my father's cattle to the mountains, I first came in contact with him. I think it was 1908. He slipped out of the shadows one evening while we were watching the cattle near Schrack's Ford at Rail Road Flat. The group I was with had seen him previous to that date. At that time he was about 30 years of age, neat, and an interesting story-teller. I was interested in him but the Schrack brothers were suspicious of him. They thought he was a thief and called him "That Crazy Englishman." I went east to school that year and did not return to the mountains until about 1930 when I met him again at Camp Tamarack where he was camping. At that time he was much older and had allowed his hair to grow long. He was not as neat and well kept as he was in 1908. Also, he did not appear to be hiding from the public as he at first did.

The story that the Schrack brothers told was that he was hiding from justice, but Sam Kirk, who was with us, thought he was an English remittance man whose family was paying to keep him out of England. The Schrack brothers also said that he ranged roughly from Merced north to Folsom and was constantly on the move. He would, they said, appear at a camp fire as he did ours one night and the next evening would be 10 or 15 miles away at another. I was quite interested at that time but I forgot him while I attended college and had various interests which included service in World War I. It all came back to me when I met him in Camp Tamarack years later and he became a friend of my son who was then a boy.

Of course, what the Schrack brothers told me was simply their opinion and I am repeating it as such.

I have written two of his stories and I had others in mind that I would have to reconstruct. I had intended to make him a legendary character as indeed he is.

With kindest regards,
IRA C. SHANK,
620 Palm Avenue, Lodi, Calif.