



Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society
Volume X July, 1962 Number 4

RECOLLECTIONS OF CALAVERAS COUNTY'S FIRST FAIR

PART I

By ELSIE FLOWER

In May of 1949, Fred Burnham and Frank Tower gave me the story of the first Calaveras County Fair, held to the best of their recollection in the year 1894 on Flower Ranch near Copperopolis. They were inspired to recall that early event by reason of the fact that on May 15, 1949, the Calaveras County Fair and Jumping Frog Jubilee at Angels Camp introduced horse racing for the first time as a feature of the program.

The fair of 1894 and the fair of 1949 had two things in common; they both raced quarter horses, and the side hills overlooking the courses were utilized as "camping" spots. Fred Burnham said that families came from miles around with their children to that first county fair and settled themselves, with their lunch baskets, under the shade of the pines and oaks that grew on the hillside bordering the track. And, of the Calaveras County Fair, fifty-five years later, Carl Mills, executive-secretary, reported that many of California's trailer clubs reserved the choicest hillsides around the fairgrounds for a three-day period during the fair and jubilee, May 13-15, 1949.

Ed Moore of Copperopolis, at one time assemblyman for the Mother Lode district, was president of the association which put on that first county fair. My grandfather, Nathan Munroe Flower (1828-1919), a native of New York State, was a California pioneer of 1852 and a settler in Calaveras County in 1880. He built a half-mile track on a level stretch of his ranch and erected stalls and a judges' stand. It was his idea to assemble the best livestock of the countryside at these competitive meetings and thus improve breeding standards.

Although we remember many general details in connection with the old race track, we are indebted to Fred and Frank for the names of some of the ranchers who ran their quarter horses to victory on that early-day track and to some extent laid the foundation for the popularity that the quarter horse enjoys today.

These recollections were originally used thirteen years ago in a series of broadcasts on the Peffer radio station KGDM, Stockton. The following is the script of that broadcast, telling the story just as Fred and Frank gave it with interpolations by Alice Beckwith Howe and Jack Morley. All are now deceased.

The first Calaveras County Fair was almost exclusively a horse-racing event, although there were some

(Continued on Last Page)



"MR. CALAVERAS"—Honored by Matuca Chapter, E. Clampus Vitus, with a plaque commemorating his recognition as "Mr. Calaveras" by the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors was Judge J. A. Smith, Superior Court jurist in Calaveras County for 40 years. Shown above with him and Mrs. Smith are (left) F. W. "Bill" Russell, Noble Grand Humbug, and Archie Stevenot (right), Sublime Noble Grand Humbug, at the plaque dedication ceremonies at the Calaveras County Courthouse in San Andreas last June 16. (See Editorial.)—Photo by Earle Edmiston.

CAMANCHE

June 22, 1962, marks the end of one of our Calaveras mining communities that dates back to the Gold Rush, for on this day the Camanche Post Office was closed. Stamp collectors were especially interested as a special cashet for the last day cancellation was sponsored by the Calaveras County Historical Society and the Chamber of Commerce. Many self-addressed envelopes were received by Mrs. Beulah Scates, postmistress, from stamp collectors asking her to hold them for last day cancellation.

The post office was first established on January 23, 1861, as Clay's Bar. William Vangorder was appointed postmaster, serving until October 9, 1863, when Nicholas Zimmerman was appointed.

The post office name was changed to Camanche February 26, 1864, and Nicholas Zimmerman was again named postmaster.

The Camanche Post Office was discontinued for several months, beginning November 11, 1886, when the mail was sent to Wallace. Upon being reestablished May 18, 1887, it was in continual service until its closing last month. Miss Mary Duffy was appointed postmaster at the time of reestablishment.

On January 25, 1938, Miss Duffy was succeeded by Mrs. Altha P. Rust, who served until August 1, 1939, when Mrs. Marie I. Miller was appointed postmaster.

Reuben Merriweather became acting postmaster July 5, 1944, and was commissioned November 26, 1944. He was succeeded by the present postmaster, Mrs. Scates, who served as acting postmaster until she became commis-

(Continued on Next Page)

HOLMAN-BIDDLE SHOOTING

One of the problems faced by the East Bay Municipal Utility District in building the 11-mile Camanche Reservoir has been the relocation of some 400 grave sites in the area to be flooded. William Lange, of Lodi, has been in charge of the work but Phillip Montgomery, doing most of the research to determine next of kin, has traveled more than 3000 miles in the search.

Some of the oldest marked graves are located in the Dorsey-Holman-Osterman Cemetery on the outskirts of Camanche. Buried in this cemetery is Constable Samuel Holman, who died with his boots on in 1901. There are several variations of the tale, but the best authenticated is as follows:

Holman entered a store that once stood on the site of Deadman's or Goodman's Corner (near the present intersection of Highway 12 and Camanche Road, near Wallace) and found two drunken men creating a disturbance. Words were exchanged and one of the men fired his gun and wounded Holman fatally, but before he died, Holman blasted his assailant, a man named Biddle, with his shotgun, nearly tearing his leg off. Biddle also died.

One version is that he was bleeding to death in the road after the gun battle, borrowed a gun from a passerby, and shot himself in the head. Biddle was buried in Hill Cemetery, also near Camanche. His grave was one of only five which could be identified by EBMUD searchers at Hill Cemetery. There are some 35 grave sites there.

CAMANCHE

(Continued from First Page)

sioned April 18, 1955. Mrs. Scates served continuously since her appointment.

Post Office site location records dated June 11, 1864, show the Camanche Post Office located a half-mile south of the Mokelumne River and eight miles southwest of the Polands Post Office.

Records dated June 13, 1887, locate this post office three-fourths of a mile south of the Mokelumne River, one-fourth mile south of Dragoon Creek, and three miles north of the Burson Station on the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada Railroad.

On December 3, 1887, the post office was located one-fourth mile south of the river, five miles northeast of the Campo Seco Post Office, and 20 miles east of the Lodi Central Pacific Railroad tracks.

Lippincott's GAZETEER OF THE WORLD, published in 1880, describes Camanche as "A postvillage of Calaveras County, California, near the Mokelumne River and about 42 miles SE. of Sacramento. It has three general stores and several gold mines."

The closing day ceremonies were sponsored by the Calaveras County Historical Society and the Calaveras County Chamber of Commerce. Paul E. Lewis, a member of both organizations, was in charge of the celebration preparations.

However, most of the long-time residents of Camanche already have pulled up stakes and moved to higher ground, as the entire area surrounding this one-time booming mining town is doomed to become inundated by 100 feet of water by the large Camanche Dam and Reservoir being constructed by the East Bay Municipal Utility District as a water supply for the Oakland area. The reservoir will cover 1580 acres in Calaveras, Amador and San Joaquin counties when completed in 1964.

CHILI GULCH

Chili Gulch was one of the principal placer mining centers in Calaveras County. It is located about two miles south of Mokelumne Hill and is about five miles in length, at the northern tributary of the North Fork of the Calaveras River. The name is derived from the great number of Chilians who mined in the Gulch in 1848 and 1849. The mines were worked on a much larger scale after water came into the district from the South Fork of the Mokelumne River. At that time great pits were washed out by the hydraulic method of mining. Chili Gulch had both surface and deep channel mining. Today great quantities of tailings may be seen along Highway 49 that crosses Chili Gulch.

Mokelumne Hill was the center of most of the trading of that area, but a store was maintained at what was called The Junction for many years. There were many rich spots in the Gulch at what is known as Copenhagen Diggins, one mile south of Mokelumne Hill. It is said that two men with a long tom took out 100 ounces per day here. On the Gulch at Chili Flat was located the Ambuster Hotel and store, built in 1851, and the Mercier Chateau, located one-fourth a mile below. It was a large two-story building, famous for its beautiful flower gardens and gay parties. The Gulch was the scene of the so-called "Chilian War." From the Green Mountain Claim was extracted the largest known quartz crystal. A school was established in 1856 known as Chili Gulch School. A post office was established at the Gulch on October 10, 1857, called Chili, but was discontinued on February 14, 1860. It was reestablished August 31, 1861; discontinued August 16, 1872; reestablished May 14, 1873, and discontinued January 24, 1877. On December 31, 1891, a post office was established and called Chili Junction but moved to Mokelumne Hill on October 2, 1892.

AH-SEE-ONE

By MRS. EVA SORACCO

I have seen many a prospector in recent years throw down his gold pan in despair and exclaim: "It's no use, I guess the Chinaman got it all." I suppose that is more or less the truth as most everyone knows that the early population of Calaveras County consisted of a great many Chinese. There were almost a dozen Chinese to one Caucasian in some places.

They formed large companies and worked the rivers and gulches for the deposits of gold. The deep holes in the rivers were very rich, and in order to get the water out, they used what was known as a Chinese pump. It consisted of a sort of treadmill. This was a wheel on the principle of a water wheel. The motive power was a Chinese, who would get on the wheel and keep walking from one paddle to another, thus keeping the wheel turning. The pump was a long trough with a chain of buckets which were kept turning by the means of the water wheel going through the trough with a load of water. In this simple manner they would bail out a deep hole in a short time. Once the water was out, they would shovel the gravel into sluice boxes and wash the gravel for gold.

They made some very rich clean-ups. Some got rich and went back to China but others just gambled their money away.

It was customary for most of them on hot summer days to work under the shade of large black Chinese umbrellas. This custom, however, irked the other prospectors who worked unprotected in the heat. In revenge they would throw rocks at the umbrellas and then laugh

HILLS OF CALAVERAS

HARRY T. FEE

Oh, the hills of Calaveras
Their every shrub and tree
Out there beside our county line
Seem sort of neighborly.
Perhaps they're just like all the hills
That glorify the west,
But the hills of Calaveras
Somehow I like the best.

I like the Mariposa heights,
The hills of Amador,
The slopes where Old Tuolumne
Unfold its magic lore,
The beauties that unfold them
From chaparral to pine,
But the hills of Calaveras
Are just old friends of mine.

Back there in that dim childhood,
Their flowing histories start
And the beauties of their wildwood
Are graven in my heart.
Of all the west, they seem the best
Wherever hillsides roam,
The hills of Calaveras
Are the closest hills to home.



MUSEUM BUILDING DEDICATED—Mrs. Colynn Lambert unveils the plaque at the Forrester Building in Murphys as Archie Stevenot, "Mr. Mother Lode," looks on at dedication ceremonies May 27. The building, an adjunct to the Old Timers Museum, was dedicated to the memory of Frank Forrester, native and life-long resident of Murphys. (See Editorial.)—Photo by Earle Edmiston.

as they watched the Chinese run in all directions. Therefore, their custom of working in the shade of the umbrellas was soon done away with.

When the gold played out the Chinese began disappearing, except for a few that remained and worked the rivers and gulches over and over again.

In the Spring of 1859, a company of about 20 Chinese worked in the Calaveras River. "Ah-See-One" was their leader. He had just arrived from Hong Kong. Though very young he was bright and worked hard and made a great deal of money. But like most young Chinese of that time he liked to gamble.

Then, one by one, as the years went by, all the men of his company went back home. But Ah-See-One had disobeyed a custom of China. He had cut his queue off so he was not permitted to go home with his friends. He remained here alone and lived in a small two-room shambled cabin near the banks of the river that he had once known to be so rich. The cabin had a dirt floor which was always neatly swept. A hole in the floor of the first room was what he used for a stove. It was always piled high with small bits of wood. A small slow stream of smoke rose from it continuously and disappeared through the large cracks in the walls. Long beads of soot hung from the ceiling. The entire room reeked with the smell of smoke yet there was a cleanliness about it. From the door of the second room hung a bamboo curtain of many bright colors. In this room no one was ever allowed to enter. There he seemed to keep his supply of food and perhaps some of the gold that he had hidden away. His crude-looking bed set high from the floor. It was built of thick boards resting on a wooden frame. A few light blankets were spread over the top.

In the evening after a long hard day's work he would sit at a little round table that was cluttered with many types of small cups and teapots. First he would sip from

one cup then another. He seemed to be sampling different blends of tea. Later he would relax by sitting on the edge of the high bed and puff dreamingly on his long Chinese pipe. Although his expression was blank, one could almost read his thoughts between the slow puffs of smoke. Perhaps he was thinking of his friends back home in far away China or perhaps he was thinking of all the gold that he once gambled away.

In all the years that he had been in this country he could not speak English—that is, so that you could clearly understand him. We were so used to seeing him working in the river with his rocker that he seemed to be part of it. Many times after school picnics we would bring him cake or cookies. He always seemed happy to see us. He would ask our names, then try to repeat them, then laugh. I suppose our names sounded as strange to him as some of the Chinese names sounded to us. We sort of used him for a weather man. We would ask him if it was going to rain. He would remove his coolie hat and gaze at the sky for a while, then give his answer—and he was usually right.

When he became too old to work in the river, he was given aid by the county. He lived for many years with this help. In 1919 he was found dead in his crude bed by neighbors. At the time of his death he was deep in his 90's. Ah-See-One was one of the last of the many thousand Chinese that once worked the Calaveras River.

OFFICERS OF CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

San Andreas, California

Judge J. A. Smith, President San Andreas
 Paul Lewis, Vice-President San Andreas
 Coke Wood, Second Vice-President Murphys
 Sadie Hunt, Secretary Valley Springs
 Violet Cuslidge, Treasurer San Andreas
 Board of Directors: Mrs. Alice Eldridge, San Andreas; Harry
 Buchanan, Rail Road Flat; Mrs. Rhoda Dunlap, Sonora;
 Claude Smith, West Point; Louis Domenghini, Mt. Ranch.

Editor of Las Calaveras Coke Wood, Murphys

Las Calaveras is published quarterly by the Calaveras County Historical Society for the benefit of the members. Membership in the society is \$4.00 a year. Non-members may obtain copies of Las Calaveras for \$1.00 a copy. The 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 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 members of the Calaveras County Historical Society are happy at the great honor bestowed upon our beloved president, Judge J. A. Smith, by the Board of Supervisors of Calaveras County, who passed a resolution making him "Mr. Calaveras." The plaque carrying the resolution was placed on the wall of the historic courthouse in San Andreas. The dedication took place on June 16, 1962, under the auspices of Matuca Chapter, E. Clampus Vitus, with Noble Grand Humbug Bill Russell presiding. The main dedicatory speech was made by Sublime Noble Grand Humbug Archie Stevenot, "Mr. Mother Lode," who pointed out that this honor was bestowed upon the Judge because of his 40 years service as Superior Court Judge, for his service to the youth of the County, for his civic leadership, and for his research and writing of the history of the County.

The Calaveras County Historical Society named the Judge as "Mr. Calaveras" in 1957 at the time of his retirement and we are happy that the Board of Supervisors made the honor official.

* * *

Your editor wishes to express his appreciation for the fine cooperation of many of the members of the Society in the dedication of the new Forrester Building of the Old Timers Museum in Murphys.

Archie Stevenot did a fine job as Master of Ceremonies, Judge Smith and Amon Tanner gave interesting talks, and Helen and Paul Lewis played several old time tunes as harmonica duets. There were many members of the Society present for the dedication. The Woods are especially grateful for this cooperation in our efforts to preserve our local Murphys heritage.

* * *

All members who attended the May meeting were greatly impressed by the fine presentation given by

charter member Emmett Joy of San Francisco and Mokelumne Hill on the history of Mokelumne Hill.

* * *

Paul Lewis reported at the May meeting that plans had been completed to transfer some of the remains from the Camanche Reservoir cemeteries to the Pioneer Cemetery near San Andreas. The cost would be borne by EBMUD and a suitable marker erected.

FIRST FAIR

(Continued from First Page)

exhibits. Fred Burnham remembers that he exhibited a pretty red pig of the Jersey breed and a black two-year-old colt named "Duke" and took first prize for each. Frank Tower entered his beautiful little single-footer, "Daisy A," and she was ridden to victory by one of the prettiest school-girls in Salt Spring Valley.

Frank has the idea that the rider was Alice Beckwith, who is now Mrs. Marcus Howe of Stockton, but when we asked Mrs. Howe to tell us something of the race, she said she was not the heroine of the day. The rider, she says, was Julia Bower of Salt Spring Valley, one of the most skillful young horsewomen in the county. However, it was Frank Tower's speedy little mare who occupied the spotlight. She had been trained to a number of tricks and was what we would today call a "high school" or an "educated horse." Frank says that after she had won the race and had been taken to her stall, she broke away and returned to the track. The girl, who had ridden her, approached, touched her gently with her riding crop, and at this command, "Daisy A" knelt and allowed the girl to mount, much to the delight of the crowd.

Julia Bowers, according to Mrs. Howe, was one of the prettiest girls in Calaveras County, in her 'teens, a perfect blonde. She made her home in Salt Spring Valley with the family of Dr. W. W. McCoy, an old-time cancer specialist, well known in early days for his successful treatment of malignant growths. In those school-days Alice Beckwith and Julia Bowers were about equal in the skill of horsemanship. Mrs. Howe (Alice Beckwith) says that her saddle horse, "Gypsey," was known all over the countryside for his speed and spirit and, although she often ran him against other horses in school races at Salt Spring Valley, she never rode him in public contests. The two school-day chums later became sisters-in-law when Julia Bowers married Alice Beckwith's brother, Harry.

The ranchers who ran their quarter horses in those first county fair races are listed by Fred Burnham as Doc Shoemaker and his brother, John; Rant T. McCarty, John Davis and his brother, Andrew Davis, all of Copperopolis; and I. N. Neely, a livery-stable man of Milton and Copperopolis. The most famous trainer and rider of the day was Jack Morley, now 78, living in Murphys, where he is the town constable. Morley is authority for the statement that the first horse races in the Calaveras County area were held in Mokelumne Hill in 1853 and in San Andreas in 1854. He says that races were held at Copperopolis in 1883, '84, and '85. Interest aroused by these contests brought into existence the first county fair association and by 1894 the quarter horse had come to a fine standard of development.

(To be concluded in the next issue of Las Calaveras)