



Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society

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THE CELEBRATED JUMPING SONG of the Calaveras County Frog

by *Bonnie Miller*

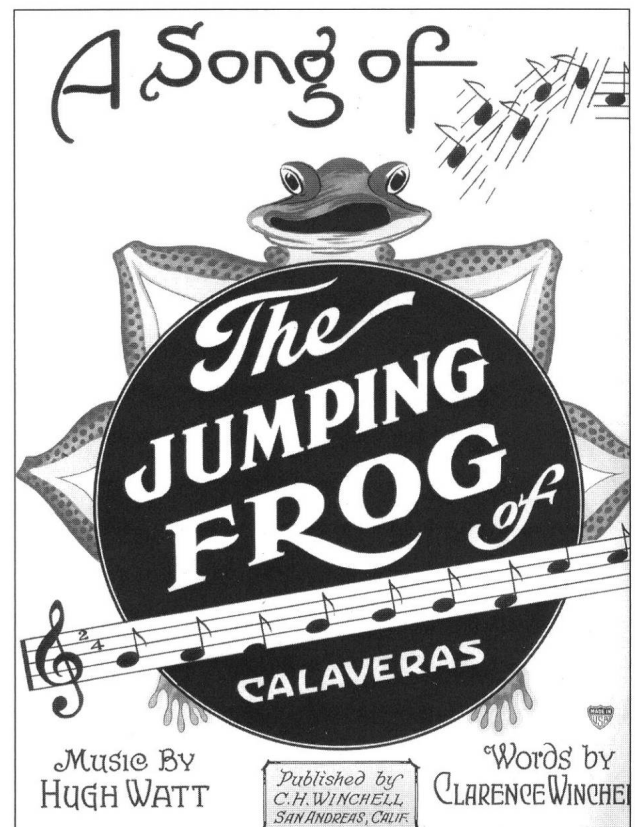
Calaveras County loves Mark Twain, and especially his jumping frog. The world around loves the jumping frog story, in all its humorous written versions. What is not well known is that the story has also been put to music.

Twain wrote the story in 1865 and it propelled him to fame. He produced five versions of the story in his lifetime before he passed away in 1910. Regrettably he did not live long enough to hear the first song about his jumping frog.

The Jumping Frog Jubilee

The Angels Camp Boosters was formed in 1926 to promote businesses in Angels Camp. When the main street was paved two years later, they staged the first frog jump, right in the middle of the road. Within ten years the event had outgrown downtown and was moved to the fairgrounds.

A San Andreas man, Clarence Winchell, thoroughly enjoyed watching that first Frog Jump Jubilee. Winchell lived in San Andreas with his wife and four children, but his heart was in entertainment. He was always striking up a song or creating something new and dazzling for entertainment. He had written songs and plays. He even had a tamed pet deer that did tricks.



Cover of the first known Jumping Frog Song
by Clarence Winchell, Copyright MCMXXIX, 1929.

THE JUMPING FROG OF CALAVERAS

Words by Clarence Winchell

Music by Hugh Watt

I'll sing to you a verse or two
of a tale of long a-go
To Old Mark Twain, you must lay the blame,
For 'twas he who said, "Its so."
Its just a little episode,
That once occurred on the Mother Lode,
In Angels Camp the Frog's abode,
The home of the Jumping Frog

Chorus:

O, the Jumping Frog, the Jumping Frog,
The Jumping Frog of Calaveras
Come and see the Froggies there,
They are jumping ev-'ry where.
The Jumping Frog, the Jumping Frog.
The Jumping Frog of Calaveras
Come to Calaveras, To the Froggies Jubilee. The lee.

To days each year are set aside,
for the Froggies Jubilee.
Brings back the days of "Forty nine,"
And folds you will all agree.
In Angels Camp, Frogs celebrate,
And represented from ev-'ry State,
Though ev-'ry doggie has his day
But frogs have theirs in May.

Chorus

We all know well the Jumping Frog,
Twain's story of by gone days
Bets were won on leaps they made
'Way back in the bar room days
Buck shot played its part in the game,
But Froggies made the story fame
The country is dry and not the same,
But think of the good old days.

Chorus

The Jumping Frog of Angels Camp
Was considered to be the champ
They brought a Frog from Jackass Gulch,
And you bet he was no tramp
They laid a track, when all was set
And every one put down his bet
The frogs they jumped and jumped and jumped
By heck they're jumping yet.

International Copyright MCMXXIX
By C H Winchell

Winchell's friend, Hugh Watt, thought that Angels Camp needed some music to accompany their frog jump. Judge Smith gave Winchell and Watt a copy of the frog jump story, and the two got busy creating a song. Winchell wrote the words, and Watt wrote the music. Winchell's wife Elena drew some artwork for the cover, and the song was published the following year. They sold copies of the song at the 1929 Frog Jump.

Winchell wrote his song in the middle of the prohibition years. The lyrics make reference to the dry days at the time rather than good old days of saloons and gambling that existed during Twain's time. The lyrics are reproduced here, with all of the original nuances of spelling and punctuation.

Winchell ended up leaving town. He left his wife and four children, and the song, behind. Elena remained in San Andreas and operated a service station with her son for many decades after. She always retained the rights to the song.

The music for this version is available for viewing in the county museum. Talented docents may greet visitors with a piano recital of the song.

The Opera

Twenty years and two thousand miles away another composer put the story to music. In 1949 the famous German composer Lukas Foss wrote a musical score of the jumping frog story. Foss was known for trying a variety of musical styles, giving the impression that he only dabbled in his work. He loved to compose for the theater. He was an accomplished and talented composer, and it is quite a compliment that he leant his superior musical skills to this funny story. Critics came to regard his Jumping Frog composition as a coming of age piece in his career. The music was said to be full and mature.

Foss partnered with Jean Karsavina, who wrote a libretto to accompany his music. The result was a two-scene comic operetta that runs about fifteen minutes. It debuted May 18, 1950 at Indiana University.

"I heard of pet cats and roosters

And rats and seals and pedigreed hogs,

There's many contend a dog's man's best friend,

But whoever keeps pet frogs?" mocks the stranger, sung in bass, in the opera.

Smiley replies in his tenor voice, "Some not only keep 'em, some train 'em."

Smiley's friends, or "crapshooters," are the opera's chorus. They watch the exchange and remark "Listen to him mockin' Dan! Ain't he just the meanest man?"

In 1970 the score was published. The piece has been copyrighted by the Carl Fischer music company.

Lloyd's of Hollywood

Ten years later another version surfaced. In April of 1959, a small record label in Los Angeles cut a 45 rpm record, with a single on each side.

Lloyd's of Hollywood was a smaller record company that existed in the 1950s and 60s. They typically issued singles and 45s. That year they made the recording called "The Ballad of the Jumping Frog." It was issued in a green paper jacket, and given out that year as a souvenir of the fair.

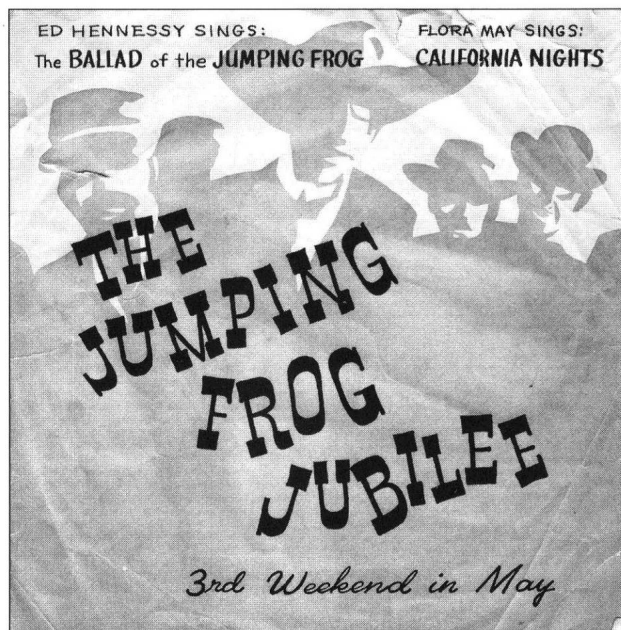
On one side of the 45 was the jumping frog song, performed by Ed Hennessy. On the flip side was a single by Flora May called "California Night." Both cuts on the record were noted as penned by Hennessy. The jumping frog song is a folksy western song accompanied with a guitar. It has lively lyrics and a catchy melody.

This version occasionally appears at records sales. *Las Calaveras* has been unable to determine any more about Ed Hennessy or this record.

The One-Man-Band

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a performer named Bob Wade was making the fair circuit around California. Wade went by many names. He was born Robert Waite, but could be found performing under the name Bob Waite, Bob Wade, or even Pappy Wade.

Wade was an army veteran. He began his career in 1942 acting and performing for the USO. He wrote and sang numerous country songs. By 1970 he was already considered a 30 year veteran performer from nightclubs, on the radio, then television, and in numerous movies.



He claimed the movies "Play it Again Sam", "Harold and Maude," and "What's up, Doc?" in his experience.

Wade lived in Burlingame in the Bay Area and toured to the various venues where he performed. He played at Cal Expo twice, opened the Lodi Grape Festival in 1972, and performed at numerous California County Fairs. He even sang at the Black Bart Inn in San Andreas. "Where Pappy plays, attendance soars," boasted his resume. Wade had a great act. He was literally a one-man-band.

Wade could vary his performance depending upon the event. He could tackle anything from hobo, western, or story teller to white tie and tails singing big band tunes. His instrument was a home-made affair. It included among other things a dobro, a harmonica, a guitar, drums and even pie tins attached to his feet. One (unreproducible) old photo shows Wade dragging an odd structure into an event. The machine was his one-man-band musical instrument, lovingly named "Betsy Trash."

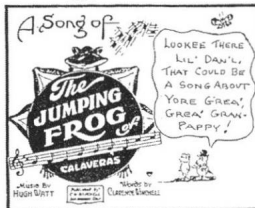
At one time in Wade's schedule he was booked at the Calaveras County Fair. In addition to playing his one-man-band performances, Wade got the privilege of enjoying the fair. He was awestruck with the jumping frog competition. He so enjoyed the competition that he decided to put the event to song.

Wade claimed to have written the "official" song of the jumping frog contest in 1972. His was also called "The Ballad of the Jumping Frog." He sang the song in a competition in Auburn in 1972. It was the state championship for amateur country and western music, and he took second place.

Wade also mentioned that the song had been selected for a songbook of country tunes. Regrettably

The Jumping Frog of Calaveras

Words by
RENCE WINCHELL



Music by
HUGH WATT

Moderato

I'll
Two

Vamp

ecitative

Copyright MCMXXIX by C. H. Winchell
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A page of music from the song written by Clarence Winchell, 1929.

To Ellie

5

The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County

Libretto by
JEAN KARSAVINA
after a story by
MARK TWAIN

Music by
LUKAS FOSS

OVERTURE

Piano¹⁾ Presto ($\text{♩} = 104$)

¹⁾Orchestra Score and Parts on rental.

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Duration
45 minutes

THE BALLAD OF THE JUMPING FROG

By Ed Hennessy

Jim Smiley was a friend of mine, and faithful as a dog
He dug for gold in forty-nine, and drank his share of grog
But best of all he loved a certain celebrated frog
The jumpin' frog of Calaveras County

This leapin' little critter was the pride of Angels Camp
He never was a quitter and he acted like a champ
His name was Daniel Webster, this amphibious little scamp
The finest frog in Calaveras County

We'd holler "Jump! Daniel, Jump!" and he'd fly right
off the stump
He didn't even need a bit of pokin'
When the other frogs was beat by a half a dozen feet
Old Daniel sat there blinkin' and a croakin'

Jim Smiley poured ten whiskeys down one afternoon in May
And met two men from New York town who just got
in that day
And then he started braggin' that he'd bet his life away
On the greatest frog in Calaveras County

These fellers dressed so neatly both were more than
Smiley's match
They said they'd bet complete on any frog that Jim
could catch
And when he was gone they loaded buckshot down
poor Daniel's hatch
The heaviest frog in Calaveras County

We hollered "Jump! Daniel, Jump!" but he stayed there
on that stump
He didn't even show what he was thinkin'
When the other frog let fly with an amateur's try
Old Daniel sat there croakin' and a blinkin'

Jim Smiley was a busted man with nothing in his sock
He picked up Daniel Webster and he got an awful shock
The former champion's belly was as solid as a rock
The hardest frog in Calaveras County

Them slickers took their booty and a trail we couldn't find
Then Smiley got so moody that he nearly lost his mind
And just last week he passed away and all he left behind
Was a famous frog of Calaveras County

We hollered "Jump! Daniel, Jump!" but he laid there
on that stump
He didn't mind the drinkin' or the jokin'
And when Jim was laid to rest as the sun sank in the west
Old Daniel sat there blinkin' and a croakin'

ribbet, ribbet

Las Calaveras has been unable to confirm this, nor find a copy of his song. It is not known if this is the same song sung thirteen years earlier by Hennessy or not.

Bob Wade and his wife eventually retired to Calaveras County. He passed away in 2004.

Dr. Elmo

The frog jump of 1990 was never the same after the giant frogs of Cameroon visited Angels Camp. The huge Goliath frogs left quite an impact on the visitors' idea of a frog. One person amused by the giant frog ordeal was Elmo Shropshire.

Elmo Shropshire was a veterinarian who moved to San Francisco from Kentucky. He became an avid long distance runner, and played music and sang with a blue grass band. Like Twain, Shropshire had a great sense of humor. Like Clemens and Twain, Shropshire performed under a stage name. He is known as Dr Elmo. Twelve years ago he had recorded the now classic Christmas song, "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer."

The raucous over the large African frogs invading bucolic Angels Camp got Dr Elmo's creative juices flowing. In 1992 Shropshire wrote and recorded his version of a jumping frog song. He had never been to the frog jump, but had "... *always pictured it as an unspoiled and verdant place welcoming springtime in a youthful and callow fashion.*" That youthful perspective is evident in his lyrics, reprinted here by permission from Dr Elmo himself.

Today Shropshire is retired in Novato, and continues to play music and write amusing songs. His song, also titled "The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" is the one we hear every year on the radio around fair time.



Bob Wade proudly holds one of his trophies in front of the offices of the Calaveras Prospect, 1972.

The frogs keep jumping

There have been many recorded versions of the jumping frog story. When spoken, but accompanied with music, these renditions are called story songs. Probably the best known recording of the jumping frog story was done by master story teller Walter Brennan. Brennan's folksy voice communicated the story to the listener like no other rendition could.

Walter Brennan recorded many of Mark Twain's tales. In 1956 he issued an album just of Twain stories. The American Heritage project included some of those recordings in an audio collection of Twain produced in 2001.

If a Calaveras old timer is asked about a jumping frog song, they'll probably recall the one written by Winchell. Many families still have copies of that music sold at the 1929 Jubilee. If a new comer is asked about it, they may recall having seen it at the museum. Or they may think of Dr Elmo's version that they hear on the radio. The 1929 song appears to be embraced locally as the favorite among the older generations, with Dr Elmo's being most familiar to the younger folks. Most people are not aware of the other renditions.

"The King of Rock 'N' Roll" is a pop song by Prefab Sprout. It contains the oft-repeated lyrics "*hot dog,*

jumping frog, alberkirkie." It has nothing to do with Mark Twain's song. There are also numerous children's songs about jumping frogs that are not related to Twain.

Most recently, yet another version of Brennan's renditions of Twain's stories was released in 2008. Whether spoken or accompanied with music, it proves that good renditions, or songs about those stories are as timeless as the stories themselves.

It is springtime in the Mother Lode. The annual county fair and Jumping Frog Jubilee are just around the corner. Listen carefully and you may hear one of these songs.

"By heck they're jumping yet!"

Editor's note

Las Calaveras appreciates the assistance of Laurie Giannini, manager of the Calaveras County Fair, for her assistance with historic information for this story.

The editor has gone to extensive effort to trace the songs and the songwriters, and their stories described herein. It is recognized that there are gaps in the various chapters. This story has been around for more than 150 years, and the Jumping Frog Jubilee has been in existence since 1928. No oversight was intended. It would not be a surprise if additional songs or stories came to light.

Bibliography

Good Times News, circa 1985.

Lodi Sentinel News, 9/12/1972, page F-9.

New York Times, 2/1/2009.

Elmo Shropshire, personal correspondence, 3/19/2012.

JUMPING FROG OF CALAVERAS COUNTY

Words & Music by Elmo Shropshire

In the heart of California where the angels always camp
An a frog named Dan'l Webster was the legendary champ
In Calaveras County you can hear all nature sing
And a man may be a prince there, but every jumpin'
frog's a king

Chorus:

I'm a jumpin' frog in calaveras county
I can jump a mile and if you saw me you would swear
That I'm a jumpin Frog in Calaveras County California
It's spring time, won't you meet me at the fair

Come out of hibernation and join the celebration
Sunshine open up the door and let spring fever in
An when those good vibrations, permeate amphibiations
The jubilee of jumpin' frogs is ready to begin

Chorus

Bridge:

I'm comin to California, Calaveras I want to warn ya
Ain't a fly safe when I come hoppin' in
An there ain't no toads allowed, I'll sing it right out loud
Green is the color of my true love's skin

Chorus

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January–March 2012 New Members

Carolee Harris—Pioneer
Roger Withers—Pasadena
Paul Neal & Karen Motenko-Neal—Valley Springs
Judy Galli—Mokelumne Hill
Ann Mazzaferro—San Andreas
Ronald Winkler—San Andreas
Irmgard Temple—Mountain Ranch
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Marcia Hall—Los Angeles
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Sandra Sanders—El Dorado Hills
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Calaveras County Historical Society

30 No. Main Street P.O. Box 721 San Andreas, CA 95249

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The Calaveras County Historical Society is a non-profit corporation. It meets on the fourth Thursday of each month in various communities throughout the County. Locations and scheduled programs are announced in advance. Some meetings include a dinner program, and visitors are always welcome.

The Society operates the Calaveras County Museum which is open daily from 10:00 to 4:00 in the historic County courthouse located at 30 Main Street in San Andreas; and the historic Red Barn Museum at 891 Mountain Ranch Road, also in San Andreas, which is open Thursday to Sunday, 10:00 to 4:00.

The Society's office is located in historic San Andreas, the Calaveras County seat. Visitors are always welcome to stop by the office for assistance with research, and are encouraged to visit the museums while in the area. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:00, and the telephone number is (209) 754-1058, or contact us at: CCHS@goldrush.com; Red Barn Museum (209) 754-0800.

January–March 2012

Donations

The Historical Society appreciates the following generous donations:

Claude Kauffman—copies of letters written by Clement Vandel to his mother and brother dated from 1852–1855. These letters are written in French, translated by Mr. Kauffman to English with scans of the original letters included

Dan O'Boyle—copy of photo of Milton School

Michael D. Fischer, Sr.—Newspapers from 1928 found when working on his house. The newspapers had been used as insulation in the walls.

Phil D. Alberts—Original drawings and plans for stage hold-up monument on Mountain Ranch Road including handwritten letter from Judge J. A. Smith

Donald A. Williamson Living Trust—Cash donation

Ted Laskin—copies of paperwork pertaining to Union Water Company, copies of court documents pertaining to Cutting vs. Sperry, 1884

William Lafranchi—Reproduction of letter from John K. Pattee to his parents from the 1800s, handwritten note regarding family history, program of centennial celebration in commemoration of the capture of the City of Monterey by Commodore John Drake Sloat's sailors and Marines, July 7, 1846

Patrick & Alysia McLaughlin—1900s RCA Record Player

Laura Tower—Scrapbook from National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Calaveras County 1956–1965

Buck Scott—Cash donation

Fort Mountain Ranch—cash donation for Red Barn Museum Blacksmith Shop

Julie Waters-Barcomb—Photo of first airplane in San Andreas. The plane took off from Sacramento and landed in Altaville on November 9, 1918. It crashed on take-off. Photo is accompanied by handwritten note by John Waters describing the event.

Cristina Saari—antique doll, black bonnet from 1890

Christine Cerruti-Ritter—stage coach trunk with wedding dress, shoes and stockings worn by Norma Cerruti, blankets, shawls, clothing and other items from the Cassinelli-Cerruti families

John Gates—16mm films of Leonard Ranch and other subjects (6 reels)

Oakland Public Library—photo of Putney/Sperry House in Murphys from the Voiles Collection of photos of historic houses. The house was built in 1857, and was restored in the early 1940s.

Larry Panhorst—canning label from the San Andreas Canning Co., Calaveras County, Cal. dated from 1898–1917. This features a house with water in the background, and peaches on the other side.

Phil D. Alberts—Saddle belonging to Sheriff Joseph Zwinge

Claire Lampson—Cash donation