



THE SALT SPRING VALLEY RESERVOIR

By J. A. SMITH

This reservoir is located in the so-called Salt Spring Valley in the southwestern part of Calaveras County and was built for mining purposes by the Calaveras County Water Company.

The Calaveras County Water Company was organized November 1, 1856, by J. W. Griswold, M. R. McLean, Garland Pollard, Jerome Sawyer and T. S. Abbey, with its principal place of business at Vallecito. Purpose of the company was to bring water from Griswold and Beaver Creeks and the North Fork of the Stanislaus River and distribute the water in Calaveras and San Joaquin counties.

Surveys were made in 1856 and 1857 for a ditch from Beaver Creek and the North Fork of the Stanislaus River to Angels Camp and Forks of the Road (an early-day name for Altaville). From Altaville, two surveys were made to Salt Spring Valley, one around Bear Mountain on the Stanislaus slope, and the other around Bear Mountain by the Calaveras slope.

The ditch was constructed from Beaver Creek to the North Fork of the Stanislaus and from the North Fork of the Stanislaus River it was diverted and ran into Mill Creek, thence to Peppermint Creek and by ditch to near Vallecito. This ditch in 1868 became the property of the Utica Company and is now their main canal from the Stanislaus River.

The ditch was never constructed as contemplated to Salt Spring Valley, but the survey was completed to Salt Spring Valley which provided for a reservoir at that place. The dam was to be 50 feet high and to cover approximately 1500 acres when filled. This dam was to be built on Stoney Creek (now called Rock Creek), near where it passes from the mountains to the plains.

Originally there was a small natural lake of

about 50 acres when full, within the site of the reservoir, and a claim was made to the natural flow of Tular Lake, Stoney Creek, and its tributaries. The right was also claimed to cut ditches to Rich Gulch, Gopher, and any other camp the company wished for the purpose of selling water.

The company built the dam and at that time William H. Hanford was president and William K. Morris secretary of the company. Judge Griswold of Vallecito was selected as superintendent of the work on the dam. He was an engineer and it is possible he made the surveys for the company.

The dam is earth filled with the front or face being rip-rapped for a thickness of about two and a half feet with round stones or boulders its entire length. The capacity, when filled, is 10,000 acre feet of water and the contour, when filled, is approximately 28 miles.

In 1880 the dam of the reservoir was raised and the ditch to the mine widened the entire length. The work of raising the dam was done with picks and shovels and one-horse dump carts.

The company borrowed money from Morris and Levy of Vallecito and, also, a man named Judson, giving their mortgage to secure the note. In 1863 the debt had grown to almost \$30,000.00 and to settle their obligation, the reservoir property was conveyed to Judson. The ditch property went to Morris & Levy.

Four years later, Judson conveyed the property to George W. Beaver. Beaver apparently purchased the property for the Quail Hill Mining and Water Company, as he soon turned the property over to that company. It had mining property located near Telegraph City and the water was conveyed by the so-called Quail Hill Ditch from the reservoir to the Quail Hill company's property, about 16 miles, and used in operating the mill on the mine.

In May, 1876, the Quail Hill Company sold the reser-

voir and ditches to John B. Reynolds for \$85,000.00. Reynolds was probably representing a mining company, for later in the same year the title was taken in the name of the Boston Hydraulic Mining Company. In addition to the reservoir and ditches, this company bought mining property westerly of the reservoir and used the water for quite a number of years in hydraulicking on South Gulch, Rich Gulch, Whiskey Hill, Bunker Hill, North Hill, and other claims in that vicinity.

In 1885, Thomas F. Wentworth purchased the property and held it until 1897, when it became the property of the California Company. Water from the reservoir was sold for mining and agricultural purposes for many years to farmers in the communities nearby and to the dredgers working on the Calaveras River and in the gulches.

When the Royal Mine was worked on a large scale, water for all uses was pumped from the reservoir to Hodson, a distance of about six miles. J. H. Southwick acted in the capacity of superintendent for the California Company for many years. Recently, the reservoir has been sold for irrigation purposes and the use of the ditches for mining purposes abandoned.

In the spring of 1934 a bad leak developed in the dam or gate to the dam, and on April 14, 1934, at 10:30 o'clock a. m., a diver named S. Myers, from San Francisco went down into the waters of the reservoir a distance of about 30 feet to attempt to close the inner gate. The diver was caught in the suction of the escaping water and was unable to release himself or be released from the surface.

A second diver was dispatched from San Francisco and succeeded in releasing the trapped diver at 6 o'clock that evening. The unfortunate diver was in bad shape when hoisted to the surface and was confined in a hospital for several months after his terrible experience.

THE CAVE AT CAVE CITY

For many years this was a great attraction for tourists. The original opening to the cave is high up in a limestone bluff overlooking McKinney's Creek. A second entrance was made close to McKinney's Creek and the patrons could then enter the cave without the necessity of climbing over limestone rocks jutting high in the air. In later years a debris dam was erected on McKinney's Creek just above where the old hotel stood and since that time a discoloration has appeared on the walls of the cave, and though still open it is seldom visited.

Hutchings in his "Scenes of Wonder and Curiosity in California," published in San Francisco in 1861, described this almost forgotten cave in the following words:

The cave is situated on McKinney's Creek about 14 miles west from the Big Trees. It was discovered accidentally in October, 1850, by Captain Taylor, who with others was engaged in mining on the creek, and who having finished their mid-day repast were spending the interval before resuming their afternoon's work in shooting at a mark near the back of their cabin. Mr. Taylor, having just fired his rifle, proceeded to examine the mark, and having hit the center proposed that it should be placed at a greater distance than they had ever before tried their skill, and was looking out for a tree upon which to place it when he

saw a hole among the rocks. He immediately went to it and seeing the aperture extended into the mountain for some distance, he called his companions and they co-jointly commenced to explore it.

The entrance is around the jutting angle of a ledge of rocks which hides the small mining community from sight. In 1853 it was taken up under a pre-emption right by Messrs. Magee and Angels, who erected a large and substantial hotel adjoining the cave, for the convenience of the public, at a cost of about \$4500. This hotel is commodious and comfortable and we shall long remember the enjoyment of our visit and the personal attention we received from the agreeable and enterprising proprietors.

(Note the records of Calaveras County do not show that the property was ever patented under the pre-emption claim referred to by Mr. Hutchings.)

The country around is still wild and romantic. Provided with adamantine candles we entered through a small doorway which had been blasted out to sufficient size. Thence we crept along 25 or 30 feet, threading our way through an irregular and difficult passage at first descending rapidly but afterwards level. Sometimes we were forced to stoop and at others to bend the body in accordance with the seam of the rocks which constituted the passage. Suddenly we emerged into a large vault or room, about 60 feet in length by 20 in breadth with an irregular roof running up in some places 30 feet. This room is called the Council Chamber.

The walls are dark, rough, and solid, rather than beautiful. Descending a little to the southwest, we again made our way through a long, low passage, which led to another room of half the size of the Council Chamber. Rising from the floor of this room by another passage we soon came into a third large room of irregular construction. The roof ascends until lost to sight in perfect darkness; here as far up as the eye, assisted by the dim taper, can reach, the line depositions present a perfect resemblance to a vast cataract of water rushing from an inconceivable height in a perfect sheet of foam, leaping from great shelf of jutting rock down to others, onward, widening as they near in exact perspective. This room is called The Cataract.

And well does it deserve the name. Next we descended a short distance by another passage, and entered a small round room, in the center of the roof of which runs a lofty opening, 60 feet high, of singular appearance. This apartment is called The Cathedral.

Turning back by The Cataract, we passed an easy way by a deep well of water upon the left and very singular small pools or reservoirs on the right. Leaving these we soon entered a spacious room, full 100 feet square, and of fair proportionate height. Through another low opening we entered yet another great room, near the center of which stands a large, dark structure, the perfect likeness of a full-robed Roman Bishop, minus the head, whence the name for the room, Bishop's Palace.

Descending through another small opening, we entered a room beautifully ornamented with pendants from the roof, white as the whitest feldspar, and of every possible form. Some like garments hung in a wardrobe, every fold and seam complete, others like curtains, with por-

tions of columns, halfway to the floor, fluted and scalloped for unknown purposes, while innumerable stalactites, of different sizes and lengths, hung from all parts, giving a beauty and splendor to the whole appearance surpassing description. Once as the light was borne up along a glorious fairy stairway, and back behind solid pillars of clear deposits and the reflected rays glanced through the myriads of varying forms, the whole pillars, curtains, pendants and carved work white as snow and translucent as crystal, glistened and shone and sparkled with a glory that surpassed in splendor all that we had seen in art or read in fable. This is the Bridal Chamber.

Immediately at the back of this and connected with it by different openings is another room now called The Music Hall.

It is so-called from the fact that, on one side, suspended from a singular rock, that has the character of a musical sounding board, hang a large number of stalactites arranged in a line very large at one end and gradually increasing in size toward the other, so that, if with a rod you strike the pendants properly, all the musical tones from a common bass to a very high key can be produced in perfection, ringing loud and clear through the halls, as a well-toned instrument. Here the present exploration of the cave terminates about one-sixth of a mile from the entrance.

(For many years the cave was operated by George Nicholas and Johanna Nicholas, his wife. Later it was operated by a man named Byrnes. Unless your attention is particularly directed to it, it is now impossible to locate the old town of Cave City, a typical ghost town, but once a large mining community that produced much gold.)

—"The Days of Old" — In Historic Calaveras County, by J. A. Smith.

THE OLD CAVE CITY HOTEL

For many years George Nichols conducted the Cave City Hotel at the old town of Cave City. The hotel was built after the "days of gold" at Cave City and was for the accommodation of tourists at the cave.

It was a two-story building, 20 x 40. The lower story being a large room intended as a dance hall. The upper floor being divided into five bedrooms and a large parlor.

Adjoining the main building there was an addition containing bed chambers, parlor, kitchen, dining room and wash room. The building was erected in 1881.

—"The Days of Old" — In Historic Calaveras County, by J. A. Smith (Feb. 3, 1945).

CAVE CITY

The following item appeared in the "Calaveras Weekly Citizen" of December 29, 1883, being an item credited to correspondent, Greenville Bulletin:

Cave City is in the eastern part of Calaveras County. It once contained 1000 inhabitants but in the failure of the gravel mines the population diminished as in other mining towns, till at present the "city" consists of a hotel, a saloon and a haystack. A few of the curiosities of early times still remain at the place.

One of these is the graveyard on the hillside above the town. It contains 16 graves, 15 of them filled by men who died with their boots on between '50 and '56. The graves at one time were enclosed by neat fences, but these have rotted away like the bodies they enclose and soon not a trace of the poor fellows will remain.

Another of the curiosities is the great cave from which the place took its name, and well it may be called great, not only from its extent, but for its great beauty also.

The cave has the appearance of having been at some time the subterranean outlet for some large river or lake, as it shows beyond doubt great traces of erosion by water. There are 12 large chambers with narrow passages leading from one to another. The roofs and sides are covered with beautiful formations. Many of them three feet in length are pendant from the ceiling and glitter in the lamplight like thousands of diamonds.

There is another Cavern near the town, called the Skull Cave, but from this I would advise friends to stay away. It was discovered by some Spaniards in 1844 and the county was named after it, the word "Calaveras" in Spanish meaning skull. This cave extends into the mountainside about 300 feet and contains over 100 human skeletons.

The Indians have no tradition of how the skeletons were put there, but I think in time of war the unfortunate wretches were shut up in the cavern and perished for want of food and water. The skeletons are scattered all around as if the creatures had been wandering about the cavern and fallen down and died.

I am told that when the cave was discovered, several skeletons were found on the outside and also a number of flint arrow points and other Indian weapons. All around the place has a death-like appearance and anyone who goes there once will never want to see it again.

—From "The Days of Old" — In Historic Calaveras County, by J. A. Smith.

DISCOVERY OF SECOND CAVE AT CAVE CITY

A report reaching the State Mining Bureau that a new cave had been discovered at Cave City, the State mineralogist, Henry G. Hanks, with J. C. Davis, visited the cave in August 1881, and made the following report to the "Calaveras Weekly Citizen":

"We reached the cave last evening about half-past six o'clock. Under the guidance of Mr. Nichols we spent several hours that night in examining the 'Old Cave.'

"On the next day bright and early we started for the new cave. It is situated about three-quarters of a mile from the other cave and the mouth of the cave is at an altitude of 1645 feet, determined by an Aneroid barometer. We entered through an opening that was exceedingly narrow and at a distance of about 30 feet, we found the room, the floor of which was literally covered with bones of all sizes and ages.

"We dug a considerable distance into the soft, muddy soil and kept finding bones. Although we searched minutely for implements, etc., not the least sign of civilization

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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

A large crowd attended the January dinner meeting of the society at the Murphys Hotel to hear Professor Glen Price of the College of the Pacific talk about the trip which Horace Greeley made to California in 1859. This was an appropriate topic and very enjoyable as presented by Mr. Price. He pointed out that during this time, Horace Greeley was one of the most influential men in America and that his New York "Tribune" was more widely read than any other newspaper in the country. California, of course, received wide publicity in the "Tribune" as a result of the trip by Greeley.

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The Calaveras County Historical Society was represented at the Symposium of Southern California Historical Societies, held at the Los Angeles County Museum on February 5-6, by your editor, who was on the program as a speaker. About thirty societies and 140 delegates were in attendance. One of the outstanding events on the program was the talk by Father Geiger of Santa Barbara Mission, speaking on the missions today. It was interesting to hear him ridicule the swallow legend at San Juan Capistrano by asking why the swallows at San Juan Capistrano were any more scientific than at the other missions.

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All his good friends will rejoice to learn that Dr. Rockwell D. Hunt was able to drive down from Calistoga to attend the Annual Institute of the California History Foundation at Pacific. He made several short talks and seemed to have regained his strength and enthusiasm. His address is Calcadia, Calistoga, California.

No other area in California or the Nation has a more interesting history than does Calaveras County with its

famous explorers, pioneer writers, bad men, rich gold mines, and natural wonders. This should be taught to our students. What's to be gained by teaching the details of the history of Boston or Jamestown and still we don't teach about Jedediah Smith, John Bidwell, James Carson, A. T. Dowd, Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Ben Thorn or the story of the Carson Hill Nugget, the rich Utica Mine, and the discovery of the Big Trees.

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could be found. The only traces of human being outside of the bones was a quantity of ashes.

"Descending through a narrow passage, much of the time being compelled to crawl upon our hands and knees, we came to a chamber 25 or 30 feet in diameter. In this opening we found large quantities of bones. In another chamber we found written upon the walls the names of persons who had visited the cave in early times, as follows: O. Robinson, New York, 1853; D. W. Strong, J. J. Wright, H. S. Anhisen and E. Sexton, June 23, 1850; R. Dowling, J. W. Taylor, J. S. Evans, J. F. Locke, November, 1860.

"In another chamber is a large lake of water, and in various parts of the cave there are evidences of animal life, a den probably inhabited by foxes."

When asked if he could estimate the number of skeletons in the cave, Mr. Hanks replied, "I cannot, as the examinations have not been thorough enough to determine that but there are thousands." Hanks further stated that it was probably a burial place in pre-historic times, but that the way the bones are scattered and the absence of relics contradicted that theory.

Hanks took with him quite a collection of stalactites and stalagmites and bones to exhibit in the State Museum.

On September 3, 1881, the "Calaveras Citizen" referred to the cave in the following words: "The State mineralogist says that weeks of careful exploration in the Cave of the Catacombs at Cave City have failed to reveal so much as a thread of cloth by which to trace the history of the osseous remains. All that have been unearthed are skeletons of men, women and children, some ashes and a few half burned bones. The absence of implements, weapons or ornaments or a single thread of cloth seems to indicate that those who entered must have been entirely destitute of clothing.

"How these remains came there, whether they were entombed alive or dead, or to what race they belonged, is a nut for scientists to crack, and a question well meriting careful and thorough deliberation."

—From "The Days of Old" — In Historic Calaveras County, by J. A. Smith (Mar. 30, 1945).

The first fire bell at San Andreas, California, was installed in the cupola of the fire house in June, 1860. It was a well-toned bell weighing about 200 pounds. The second bell was installed in the same fire house in the month of June, 1898. When the fire house was obtained by the State of California for the widening of St. Charles Street, the old fire house was torn down, the bell stored in the present fire house and a siren installed for fire.