



PIONEERS

(Dedicatory speech made by Judge J. A. Smith, President of the Calaveras County Historical Society, at the dedication of the plaque at Mountain Ranch on June 17, 1956.)

"Many changes have taken place in this community. Mining has been at a low ebb for many years. During 1955, the entire State of California produced only about \$8,000,000 in gold. In fact the principal metal mined in California in 1955 was tungsten, with a production of \$15,000,000.

"The old-timers have gone to their reward. I remember two old miners who were still active when I first came into this community—Solari and Cuneo. They were a familiar sight going to town with their cart and horse, and they were about the last of the old pioneers in this district to pass on.

"After the diggings were exhausted or failed to produce what the miners thought they should, they moved on to other camps, always chasing the will of the wisp, that success was just a little farther on. The great majority of them in later years became in straightened circumstances, owing to their generous, reckless, and in some cases dissipated habits. Very few of them saved anything. They believed the gold fields of California were inexhaustible. Their latch string was always hanging on the outside of their door. Everybody was welcome to their hospitality. They would share their last biscuit and divide the last drink in the bottle with a stranger as soon as with a friend.

"It is unfortunate that so many of them were reduced to poverty. Many of them were required to go to county hospitals at last and today they lie in cemeteries throughout the land, many of them in unmarked graves.

"Today we reap their harvest. It was they who cleared the forests, built the roads, the bridges across the streams, and did the pioneering work necessary to develop the various communities throughout these mining regions. They are not with us any longer, but today the people of this community have a full realization of what these pioneers did. To honor

them, this monument has been erected and this plaque has been prepared to tell the world that the people of El Dorado are deeply appreciative of what the pioneer mothers and fathers did for the benefit of this community as a whole. With reverence, respect, and admiration for what they have accomplished this community today dedicates this monument and plaque in the memory of these pioneers."

EL DORADO

"Patented as a townsite in 1872 this early town derived its name from a sawmill located here. A post office established at Mountain Ranch in 1856 was moved to El Dorado in 1868 and El Dorado has thus become known as Mountain Ranch. This Bell was used from 1885 to 1953 in the local school established in Cave City School District in 1885. In 1945 this school joined with the Banner District to become the Eldorado Union Elementary School District."

Erected By

Eldorado Union Community Club

Dedicated By

Calaveras County Historical Society

June 17, 1956

State Registered Landmark No. 282

MOUNTAIN RANCH

By JUDGE J. A. SMITH

Mountain Ranch was a trading center for miners west of El Dorado. It was located about one mile westerly of the town of El Dorado and seemed to have always been held by its owners as "The Mountain Ranch." It consisted of a store and lands around the store, usually 480 acres, or $\frac{3}{4}$ sections.

The first post office in the community was established at Mountain Ranch in 1857. Later it was moved to the town of El Dorado where it has since been. John McKeon was the first postmaster.

The records of this old Ranch are meager. The first conveyance I have been able to find was one from a man named John Sanford, who on June 5, 1852, conveyed the property known as "The Mountain Ranch" to W. D. Atterbury. It is described as three-quarter sections of land, and all goods, groceries, hardware, wagon, one grey horse and one dark brown mule. This property has changed hands many times, but there does not appear to ever have been lots sold from the original property.

The main building was originally a one-story stone building and later a wooden second-story was added.

In addition there was a white frame residence, topping a gentle knoll, some outhouses, and a large barn and stable. There were no Chinese and no Mexicans.

EL DORADO

The town is El Dorado, the school district Cave City, and the post office Mountain Ranch.

There was a sawmill practically within the limits of the town operated by Wm. Irvine of San Andreas, called El Dorado Mill. Years later a mill was operated on almost the same place.

Irvine built the first steam-power quartz crusher for removing ore a half mile above El Dorado. This was the first steam-driven mill in Calaveras County. The engine used to operate the mill had been brought from Murphys, where a French Company used it on Murphy's Flat in 1851. Irvine had an early store in El Dorado.

The oldest building now in El Dorado is the store building occupied for many years by the Domenghini family.

Dughi and Rodesino had excellent buildings that they used for store purposes. I was told by a curator of the Stockton Museum that in his opinion these buildings in El Dorado are the finest examples of Mother Lode architecture in California.

The post office was moved from Mountain Ranch to the town of El Dorado and is conducted in the smallest post office building in the State.

At one time the hills surrounding El Dorado were covered with an excellent stand of pine timber. Sawmills, however, have been converting this timber into lumber until now, only the smaller trees remain.

El Dorado seemed to have inherited some of the fights, affrays and murders from Cave City. It has had a bloody history and has been the scene of much blood shed.

The townsite was surveyed in 1872 by Henry F. Terry, patented to the county judge in April, 1873.

CAVE CITY

The history of the Town of El Dorado in Calaveras County is closely connected with the history of Cave City and Mountain Ranch.

Cave City, located southeasterly of El Dorado and about the geographical center of Calaveras County on McKinney Creek, was a very early settlement in Calaveras County. The placers of this camp were worked at an early date. The cave was discovered in October, 1850, by a Captain Taylor, who was mining with his associates on the creek.

One day soon after lunch they were doing some target practice. When the target seemed too close Captain Taylor climbed the limestone rocks to place the target at a greater distance and observed an opening in the rocks. He called his companions and they began exploring the place and discovered a cave. The cave was immediately opened to the public and in 1853 McGee and Angel built a hotel for the convenience of the public at a cost of around \$5,000. The place became a great tourist attraction and people came from miles around to partake of the accommodations offered. This hotel was destroyed by fire in 1858.

Another hotel was erected and for many years it was conducted by George and Johanna Nicols.

Cave City was located on the original trail from Mokelumne Hill to Murphys.

The placers were to a large extent exhausted prior to 1860 notwithstanding that in 1860 the mines of Cave City were producing \$20,000 worth of gold dust monthly. During the flush times Cave City was a large town. It had one of the six public schools in Calaveras County that were established prior to 1854. Today it is one of the ghost towns of Calaveras County. Unless your attention was called to the location of the once proud Cave City, you would pass it by unnoticed and fail to realize that at one time it was the largest community in the east central part of the county.

A section of the mining district around Cave City was known as McKinnie's Humbug for a long time. Some maintain that the old locale of McKinnie's Humbug is where the town was eventually located.

A letter from an old-timer, Tim Davis, states that in 1850 McKinnie came from Mokelumne Hill, and, bringing some miners with him, located about midway between Cave City and El Dorado. He states further that this was the original McKinnie's Humbug, but that it was no humbug. That the mines were rich. He also states that the first store in the district was kept by a man named Harry Bechart, commonly called "The Flying Dutchman". That the store was on Huffman Gulch. (Clary and Burdett had stores at Cave City.)

This same writer claims that the first Long Tom for mining in Calaveras County was made by Abe Vanderling and his partner, McIntosh, at Secret Diggings. This place is about two miles northeast of Mountain Ranch and two and one-fourth miles north of El Dorado. That after completing their mining at Secret Diggings, they carried the Tom to Murphys and it was used in working the placers of Murphys Creek below the old toll house.

Bill Holt, a notorious character around Murphys in later days, was an old resident of McKinnie's Humbug.

Many deadly affrays took place at Cave City and murders were not infrequent.

There were many Chinese and Mexicans residing and working in the Cave City District. None were at Mountain Ranch.

Michael Bierny was a storekeeper at Cave City. A Chinaman came into the store and called for some bacon. As the store keeper stooped over to get the bacon the Chinaman stabbed him three times. He was able to escape from the Chinaman and secured his pistol, fired a shot at the Chinaman and struck him in the face. The Chinaman made his escape in the bushes, but was captured a short time later and taken to El Dorado. He was taken a short distance from the town and hanged. The storekeeper died.

Cave City was well-known for its extensive gambling. Here could be heard in the saloons the tempting jingle of gold. Here flourished the stirring fandango in all its gaudy habiliments. By 1860 the glory of the town had departed. At that time two-thirds of the houses were without tenants. The yards and in many places the streets were overgrown with rank weeds.

In 1855 fully four hundred miners made it the center of their trade. From the limestone crevices have been emptied into the marts of trade many thousand of dollars of gold dust.

The church formerly at Cave City went to decay with other buildings.

The Cave City school was moved to El Dorado, and the district is still known as Cave City School District.

Cave City is one of the ghost towns of California. Like many mining towns in California, the gold petered out and the miners moved away. The process of decay was often hurried by fire, as water under pressure was seldom available. An overturned lamp caused by a brawl or defective stove pipes might destroy the entire town, sometimes never to be rebuilt. The old prospector moved on. His thoughts are of wealth awaiting his revealing hand. Perhaps not today but surely tomorrow he will strike it rich. Thoughts of failure never daunt him. His is the optimism that never falters. He reads the story of the ages written in the silent rocks and hears tales of mysterious fortunes told by the stars.

THE TABLE MOUNTAIN DITCH

The early miners of the district were handicapped by a scarcity of water when the dry season came. To overcome this difficulty a group of men, principally from Cave City, associated themselves together as a joint stock company to cut a ditch from near the falls on the San Antone Creek into O'Neil's Creek and, thence, take the waters from O'Neil's Creek at Table Mountain Flat to El Dorado, McKinney's Diggings, and on toward San Andreas.

The head of the ditch on the San Antone was above the head of a ditch known as the Georgia Ditch. The owners of the Georgia Ditch began a suit against the Table Mountain Company and were successful in establishing a prior right to 180 inches of water. This right afterwards went to the San Antone Ridge Ditch Company and is now the property of the State of California and in use at the Fricot Ranch School for Boys.

The Table Mountain Ditch brought water into El Dorado and Cave City and was extended into San Andreas, later known as Treat's Ditch. At El Dorado a reservoir was constructed in such a manner that water could be taken from the eastern end of the reservoir for Cave City, Washington Ranch, and Old Gulch. Water could be taken from the western end of the reservoir to San Andreas and vicinity. From this ditch much washing and hydraulicing for gold was done. Water has not been brought through this ditch for many years.

RICH DIGGINGS

As late as 1865 three miners at El Dorado took out \$1,500 worth of gold in six days. This averaged over a pound of gold per day. One piece weighed three pounds.

DESPERATE FIGHT AT EL DORADO

San Andreas Independent—Dec. 4, 1858

On Sunday night last, a most desperate fight came off at the little mining camp of El Dorado in this county, between three Americans, on the one side, and a Spaniard, a Portugese and a Mexican on the other.

Two of the Americans were killed, one instantly and the other died 24 hours later. From the best information we could obtain all parties were in liquor at the time.

The names of the Americans are Marshal Nelton, Sam Brown (or Basser) and John Chambers.

In the afternoon, Nelton went to John Walker's billiard saloon and engaged in a fight with Walker, in which Nelton came off the victor. While they were fighting Brown approached and attempted to assist Nelton, when a Mexican interposed for Walker. Brown drew a pistol and the Mexican retreated without injury. This fight ended without any hurt to anyone except Walker, a quiet and peaceable man, who received a severe beating.

In the evening, Chambers having joined Brown and Nelton, the three entered a restaurant kept by one Victoriana, where the Mexican above referred to was seated with a Portugese and a Spaniard.

The Americans at once commenced hostilities. Brown seized the Portugese by the collar and was in the act of striking him on the head with a bottle when someone (supposed to be the Mexican) stabbed Brown, cutting his heart in two and as he fell forward, giving him another thrust in the hip.

Nelton attempted to assist his fallen companion when one of the opposite party, supposed to be the Mexican, gave him a slash on the head which caused a horrible gash and a thrust in the abdomen which severed his intestines. Chambers received but a slight scratch.

After the deed, the Spaniard and Mexican escaped. The Portugese was taken by the mob who were proceeding to hang him summarily when G. W. Shaklot arrived from Mountain Ranch and rescued him. He was examined Monday morning before Justice R. M. Payne and discharged for want of sufficient testimony to fix the homicide on him. The Mexican has not been found.

The affray did not last two minutes. By the time the crowd had collected Brown was dead on the floor. Nelton was lying in the street, mortally wounded, and the combatants had fled.

Nelton died on the following Tuesday and was buried at San Andreas.

PONY DENIG EXPRESS

Mail now comes to El Dorado by the so-called Sheep Ranch Stage from San Andreas.

In 1857, a man named William Maxwell Denig, commonly called "Pony" Denig, operated an express known as Pony's Express. It ran from San Andreas and distributed papers and mail, brought to this coast by steamer from the Atlantic Coast, to upper Calaveritas, Old Gulch, French Gulch, El Dorado Mill, Mountain Ranch, Cave City, O'Neil's Bar, Tunnel Hill, San Antonio Mill, lower Calaveritas, Foreman's Ranch (Fourth Crossing), and Kentucky House.

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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

For the third time in succession the Calaveras County Historical Society entered a float in the Murphys Homecoming Parade that won a prize. The float depicted the arrival of Ex-President Ulysses S. Grant in Murphys on June 11, 1879, on his way to the Big Trees. Amon Tanner was Grant, Percy Hunt was his companion, and the three ladies accompanying him were Sadie Hunt, Ella Thompson, and Ethelyn Wood. The old Tanner Big Trees Stage made the float appear to be very authentic, especially with the aid of the correct costumes worn by the passengers. Congratulations to the group on winning second place and fifteen dollars.

Paul Lewis and the people of Mountain Ranch deserve a big hand of applause for the good work they did in erecting the picturesque monument for the historical marker telling of the founding of the community. The monument was truly a community project as every family in the vicinity placed a rock in the monument as their contribution. The placing of the old school bell at the top of the monument gives it an appropriate but distinctive appearance. The excellent dedicatory program under the sponsorship of the Calaveras Historical Society was well attended, and providing cachets of the smallest post office in the United States was the final touch that made the whole project an achievement for which Mountain Ranch may well be proud.

However, we would like to correct one error that appeared in the local newspaper. It was Judge Smith who was introduced as "Mr. Calaveras" for his many years of service to the county as school teacher, judge, historical writer, and president of the Calaveras County Historical Society.

Those people up in Mountain Ranch really know how to do things well, as was demonstrated at the last quarterly dinner of the Society in the Community Hall. Mrs. Mudd's macaroni was delicious as always and the film presented by Ted Baggleman on "The Mother Lode" was excellent.

The annual meeting of the Conference of California Historical Societies held in San Jose on June 22-23 was well attended by a hundred a fifty delegates of societies from all over the State. Sadie and Percy Hunt officially represented the Calaveras Society and Sadie was again chosen as Regional Vice-President for the Mother Lode counties. She reported to the Conference that historical societies were in the process of being formed in Tuolumne and Mariposa counties.

Dr. Rockwell D. Hunt retired from the presidency and was made president emeritus. His place as president was taken by Harold Schutt of Lindsay, an active member of the Tulare County Historical Society and Vice-President of the Conference for the last two years. Your editor will continue another year as Executive Secretary of the Conference and Covert Martin will continue for another term as Regional Vice-President.

The next annual meeting will be held in San Diego on June 21-22, 1957.

MURDER OF E. SAID

On the afternoon of Wednesday, September 30, 1868, Mr. E. Said, the Superintendent of the Petticoat Mine at Rail Road Flat, was brutally murdered while on the way from the mine at Rail Road Flat to Mokelumne Hill. Mr. Said was driving his own double team attached to a double carriage and accompanied by two of his men—a man named Meek and one named Kees. Meek was on the front seat with Said and Kees occupied the rear seat of the vehicle. About two and one-half miles from Rail Road Flat, four men, masked and armed with shotguns arose from the brush that skirts the road, and without attempting to stop the horses or ordering a halt, fired two shots, one at Mr. Said, killing him instantly, and the other fired at the horses.

Immediately after the shots were fired, Meek leaped from the carriage and endeavored to escape, but was pursued, overtaken and robbed by the assassins. The horses broke into a run as the shots were fired and Kees with presence of mind and great courage, determined to prevent the anticipated robbery. Acting on the impulse, he sprang over the front seat, seized the reins from the hands of the dying man and, holding the blood-stained corpse with one hand, urged the horses forward at the top of their speed. He succeeded in bringing the murdered remains of Mr. Said to Mokelumne Hill. Dr. Hoerschner of Mokelumne Hill performed a post mortem and found that three buckshots had taken effect upon Mr. Said. One, in fact, tearing away a part of the lower jaw, one in the right side of the neck and the third passed through the upper portion of the heart.

Mr. Said was in the habit of taking the bullion from the Petticoat Mine to Mokelumne Hill, and for some time previous to his death he apprehended an attack.

On Friday, June 7, 1873, Jose B. Coyado was executed in the jail yard at San Andreas, almost four years after the murder.