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## HARVEY WOOD OF ROBINSON'S FERRY

While the waters of a new lake rise behind New Melones dam, the site of Robinson's Ferry, once the most traveled route across the Stanislaus, vanishes. One person, Arthur Bernhard, was particularly grateful to have seen the site before it was inundated. Although very much an Easterner, Bernhard gives a rich heritage to the county in making available the following relocations of Harvey Wood—Editor

Arthur Bernhard, while residing on Cherry Street in Bedford (Katonah), Westchester County, New York (1952-76), delved deeply into the history and genealogy of the families of early-day Katonah. In particular, he compiled extensive information regarding the Squire Wood family who owned land on the opposite side of Cherry Street, part of the original Van Cortlandt lot. Bernhard noted in his study that four of Squire Wood's grandsons had gone to California in the gold rush, but only one had returned to New York. One of these not returning was named Harvey, but Bernhard could find no further information regarding him.

In 1976, Bernhard moved to California to retire in Sacramento. He and his wife were soon busily touring the Mother Lode, becoming acquainted with their new home and its history.

"As we would travel," Bernhard wrote to a newspaper friend in Bedford, "we stopped to read many of the historical markers. On this particular trip in January, 1979, we stopped to read a marker near the former town of Melones on the Stanislaus River south of Carson Hill. The marker read:

ROBINSON'S FERRY — In 1848, John W. Robinson and Stephen Mead established ferry transport for freight, animals, and persons across the river, charging 50 cents for each person. In 1856, Harvey Wood purchased an interest in the ferry business and later acquired other property which stayed in the Wood's family until 1911.



**THE FERRY**

Harvey Wood escorts a buggy passenger across the Stanislaus to the Calaveras side.

*Society Files*



#### ROBINSON'S FERRY IN THE EIGHTIES

The Ferry Building is in the center, with the Wood's home in the trees to the left, and the barn in the foreground. The ferry may be seen at the landing, and the old road on the Tuolumne side of the river.

*Society Files*

"Harvey Wood? Could it be the same Harvey Wood, one of the sons of Alfred Wood, grandson of Squire Wood of Old Cherry Street in Bedford, New York, who came to California in 1859?"

Yes, so it was, as Bernhard learned from several sources of Harvey's trip to California and of his life here. In return, he presented copies of his Wood family records to some of Harvey's descendants, and to the Calaveras Heritage Council and the Historical Society.

One of the more significant items that Bernhard turned up was a copy of the "Personal Recollections of Harvey Wood." These had been written in 1878 at Robinson's Ferry. When the Wood's homestead burned in 1896, a year after the death of Harvey, one of the few possessions that survived was his "diary." Wood's son Carleton took the manuscript that same year to the Mountain Echo's office at Angels Camp, and had a dozen copies printed. Carleton's younger brother Percy recalled all of this to one John B. Goodman, III, of Pasadena, in July of 1937. Some decades later, Goodman obtained one of the only two or three copies left of the "Recollections" and privately printed a small edition. In

turn, this small edition has now become a rare item, prized by collectors of gold rush literature.\*

From the "Recollections" we learn the details of Harvey's trip by sea as a member of the Kit Carson Association, sailing on the ship "William B. Travis" to Galveston, Texas, where they arrived on February 28th, 1849. The company traveled overland from Corpus Christi to Los Angeles, arriving there on July 4th. Six members of the group then went north together to the diggings on the Merced River, reaching there on July 30th. Shortly thereafter, they continued farther to the Stanislaus River near Robinson's Ferry. We give you Harvey Wood's own remarks about this part of his adventures just as they appeared in the "Recollections":

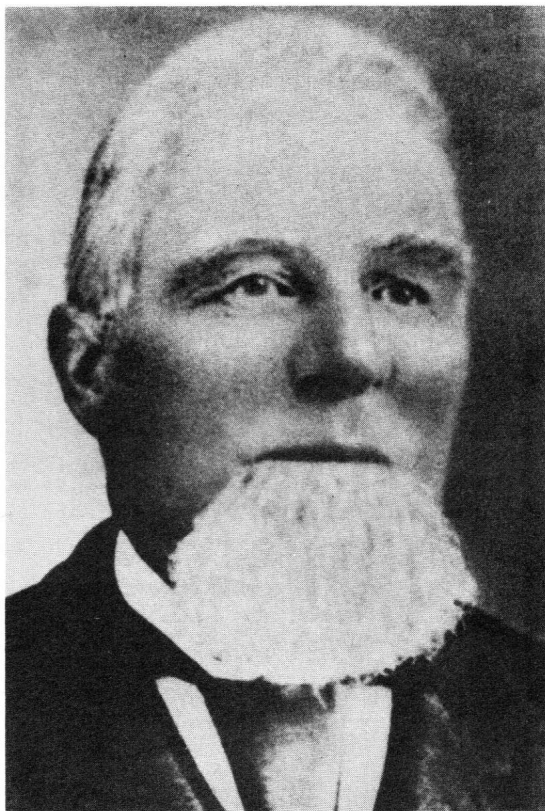
Robinson and Mead then (Aug. 15th, 1849), had a store near the mouth of Indian Gulch, kept in a tent. Mr. Mead, a perfect stranger to us all, welcomed us on our arrival saying, "Camp anywhere around here boys, and any provisions you want I will furnish you, money or no money—price fifty

\* The Society has only a xerox copy of Goodman's edition.

cents per pound." A fall of fifty cents per pound on provisions and an increase of 200 per cent in the diggings was encouraging to us all and we went to work with a will.

After mining until September I took my first trip to San Francisco to look after some goods that were shipped around the Horn to Ackerly, Huyler, and myself. Travelling at that time differed so much from the present mode I will give an account of the trip: Two acquaintances with myself left the Stanislaus River in the afternoon, our blankets packed on a mule together with a frying pan, coffee pot, and a tin cup and tin plate for each, and a few provisions. No extra clothing was considered necessary. Thus equipped we started for Stockton on foot, driving the mule ahead of us. We took our time, camped out every night. A bush or tree to spread our blankets under we preferred to any house. The food generally used was hard bread and beefsteak with a cup of coffee drank out of tin cups, no vegetables could be had at any price. We enjoyed the trip very much. On arriving at Stockton we camped outside of town and kept our own hotel. Stockton in September, 1849, was not a handsome place, but money was plentiful and the gamblers were reaping a harvest from the miners who had

been fortunate in finding good claims, made money fast and spent it still faster. Monte was the favorite game with the Mexicans. Often bags of gold dust would be staked on the turning of a card with apparent indifference as to the result. No steamboat had yet been put on between Stockton and San Francisco so we were obliged to take passage on a schooner paying \$16 passage. We made the trip in six days, tying up in the tules at night at the mercy of millions of mosquitoes, was anything but pleasant. San Francisco in September, 1849, I suppose, presented a different appearance from any other city in the world. Canvas tents or cheap frame houses were going up on all sides. The vessel with our goods not having arrived we made but a short stay in San Francisco. On the return trip to Stockton we were more fortunate, took passage on a small sloop and made the trip in two days. On my return to the mines found my partners doing very well. The day before I returned, Huyler and Fouse had made some two ounces each and concluded to have a grand supper by themselves. They invested \$8 for a small can of preserves, \$4 for one can of sardines and a few other extras making the cost of their supper \$16 each. How it tasted I cannot say as no part of it was visible on my arrival. In November,



**HARVEY WOOD**  
1828-1895



**MARINDA WOOD**  
1833-1923





#### MELONES STORE

Melones was a thriving little town when Louis Jensen took this picture in the mid-Thirties.

*Courtesy of L. H. Haigh*



#### SITE OF ROBINSON'S FERRY

This is how the site appeared in the day of the automobile. The old road on the Tuolumne side may be seen to the left. A Jensen photograph taken in the mid-thirties.

*Courtesy of l. H. Haigh*

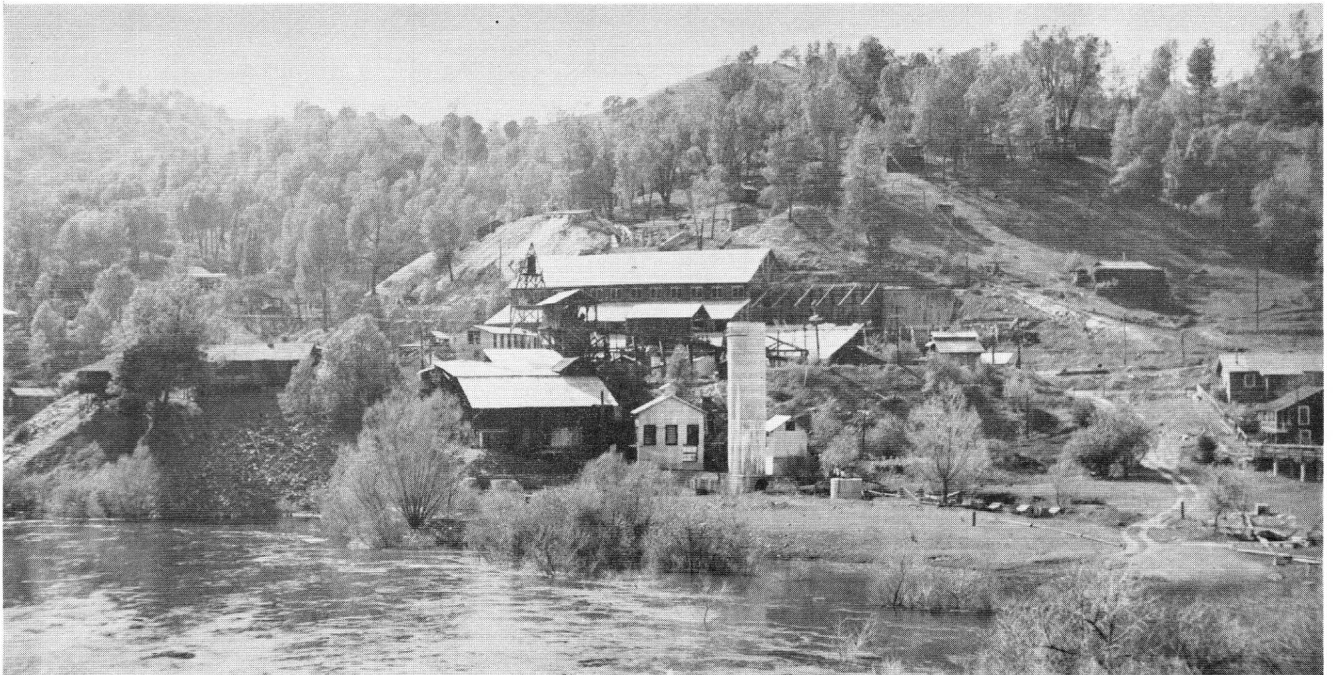




#### HERE WE ARE AT MELONES

The automobilist from the south in the Thirties would get his first view of Melones as he rounded the curve and drove down to the bridge across the Stanislaus River. The new mill of the Carson Hill Gold Mining Company is at the right. From a photograph by Louis Jensen.

*Courtesy of L. H. Haigh*



#### THE OLD MELONES MILL

Built in the earliest years of the century by the Melones Mining Company, this large mill was converted by later operators to a cyanide plant. This view, taken by Louis Jensen, was probably from the Railroad trestle.

*Courtesy of L. H. Haigh*

1849, I went to San Francisco again accompanied by messmate J. M. Fouse, who had concluded to quit mining and go to work at his trade of tinsmith. I was sorry to part company with Fouse, we had traveled and messed together from New York to the mines, passed through many trials and hardships, shared our last morsel of food, not knowing where the next would come from; among all my acquaintances I have never yet found a more noble, generous, good-hearted man than Jacob M. Fouse, of Baltimore. We parted in San Francisco in November, 1849, never to meet on earth again. He succeeded in business, had his wife and family come out to California, and at or near Grass Valley in 1856, (I believe), surrounded by his family, he departed this life.

The goods that were shipped to us around the Horn had arrived, but the storage I had to pay was nearly the value of the goods. The rainy season had commenced and long-legged boots were scarce, the price going up to \$100 per pair; one case of boots had been shipped to us among other supplies, but they could not be found, nor have I ever found out who did have the benefit of that case of boots.

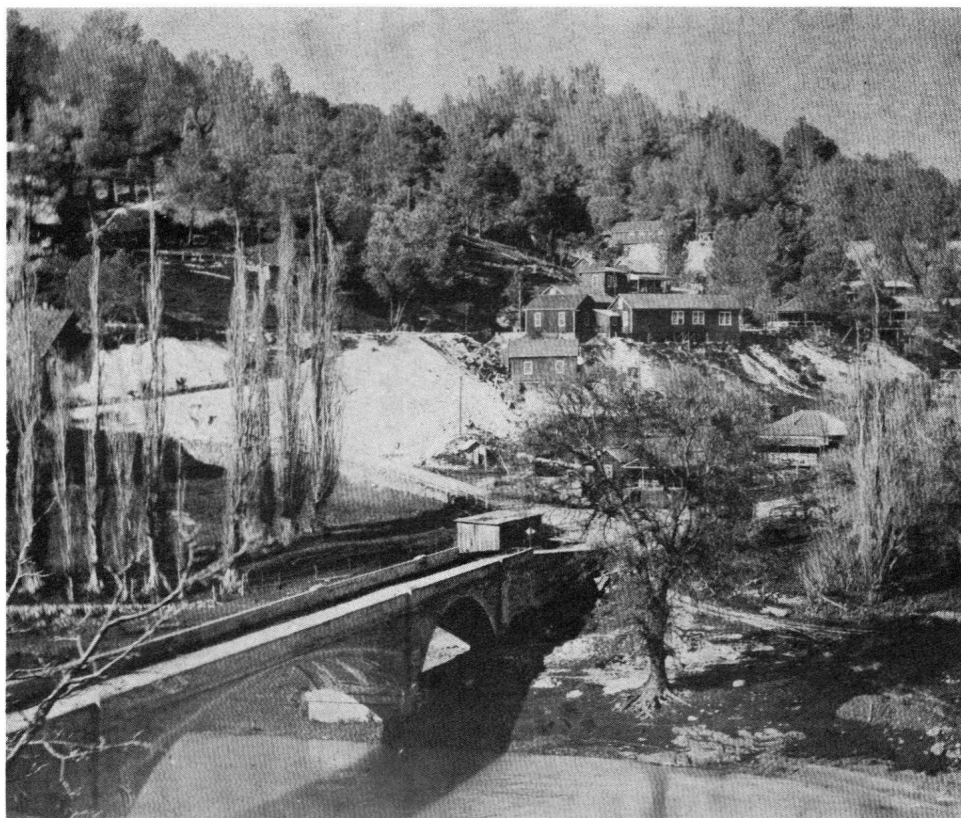
Returning to the Stanislaus River from my trip to San Francisco, we built our cabin for the winter, sides of logs, with canvas roof and the usual stone chimney of that period; only in putting it up found the draft was always the wrong way, all the smoke coming in the cabin instead of passing out, but on

tearing down and rebuilding we were quite successful.

We had some very good diggings near us—Jackass Gulch, in Tuolumne county, and Indian Gulch, in Calaveras county, yielded large amounts of gold. El Dorado Bar, between McLeans Ferry and Coyote Creek, was found to be exceedingly rich. the "Independent Twelve Company" had a very good claim on the Bar. They had a way of mining without exerting themselves much that I suppose proved as beneficial to them financially, as to work steady ten hours a day. The Twelve men had one rocker, they managed to keep going until about ten o'clock a.m. with the assistance of from four to six bottles of brandy at \$4 per bottle; by ten o'clock they would be so much fatigued that to work any more that day was too hard on their system, therefore after washing out the rocker and getting from 24 to 36 ounces of gold, and laying in a fresh supply of brandy they would rest the balance of the day by getting gloriously drunk. This they continued doing while the claim lasted, and when it began to weaken they sought new and better diggings. It was always a mystery to me what particular qualifications a worthless drunken vagabond possessed that he almost invariably had the richest and best claims, while a hard-working, industrious man, striving to make a fortune, very often found it barely possible to make expenses. In the spring of 1850 good diggings were found where Columbia, Tuolumne

**FIRST MELONES BRIDGE**  
 From a photograph taken probably about 1910 or possibly earlier. The mine dump in the middle of the picture is from the Calaveras Tunnel, and the one at the upper right in the trees is the large dump from the Melones Tunnel driven about 1900.

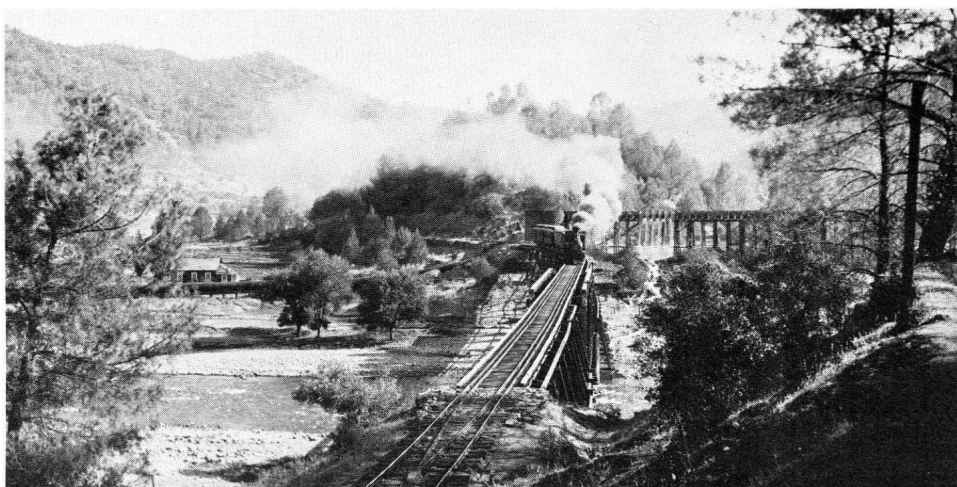
*Calaveras County Museum*



### MELONES TRESTLE

The engine gathers speed as it crosses the trestle for the long haul up to Jamestown. Note the big flume in the background that supplied the water for the Melones Mining Company's large stamp-milling operation.

*Society Files*



county, now stands. At that time Columbia was the prettiest camp I ever saw in the mines, groves of pine trees all about the place, and at night the camp fires scattered among the pines, the miners resting after the day's work (that is the steady portion) in groups of from four to six, telling over their trials and hardships either "around the Horn" or across the plains, while in the business portion of the camp the great excitement was about the gambling table. The large blue tent seemed to be the center of attraction. Chis Lillie, the prize fighter, could be seen dealing "monte" with all the grace of a professional, much more gentlemanly in his dealings than many others who followed the profession.

My prospecting in Columbia in May, 1850, did not prove profitable although we got one pan of dirt that was good. We went into an old shaft some 12 feet deep and found a narrow pay streak running into a partition between that and another shaft, commenced taking it out; could see the gold every stroke of the pick; we soon found some one was working on the same pay streak from the adjoining shaft, therefore we worked lively; soon a sharp crowbar came through from the other side and a Mexican sang out: "caramba!" Then the strife was who could get the most of the rich dirt; I am sorry to admit the Mexican beat the Yankee, for he had seven ounces in his pan and we only had \$70.

Sixteen feet square was then called as much ground as one man was entitled to hold, which brought the different owners close together. The Mexicans had the advantage in one respect, they could run drifts under ground and the surface showed no indications of having been worked. I saw one American sadly disappointed after working several days sinking his shaft anticipating a rich yield on getting down to bedrock; he was suddenly precipitated up to his neck by the bottom of his shaft falling into a drift occupied by a Mexican busily engaged in taking out rich pay. The air was blue with curses for awhile, but as the best of his claim was worked out by the Mexican before the

American struck bedrock, he had to make the best of it. Very rich diggings were also struck in May, 1850, at Scorpion Gulch and Carsons, Calaveras county. The amount taken out at Carsons was enormous, some quite heavy nuggets were found, but as usual fortune did not always favor the most deserving.

At Carsons a prospector came into camp one day dead broke in finance, called at the trading post, made known his condition, then went out to try his luck; in less than an hour he found a seven pound piece of gold; a happier miner I never saw before or since. As for myself, I was never very successful at mining; had some good claims, but none of them to rank as first-class.

In May, 1856, I bought an interest in the Robinsons Ferry property, located on the Stanislaus River between Angels Camp in Calaveras county, and Sonora in Tuolumne county, where I have resided ever since, (June, 1878).

As the seasons come and go many changes have taken place, many once prosperous mining camps have now become almost deserted. An occasional 49er can be seen, generally poor, grey-headed, broken down specimen of humanity.

Of the famous Carsons Association which numbered 53 members on leaving New York in February, 1849, I do not know the P. O. address of a single living member; many have gone the long journey while I yet remain in the mines, running the ferry boats at Robinsons Ferry on the Stanislaus.

And here, unfortunately, the "Recollections" end.

In the introduction to his edition, however, Goodman adds more information about the Wood family at Robinson's Ferry. Harvey Wood found ferry operating much more to his liking than mining, and it provided him with a good living. In 1864, he married Marinda Adelaide Gee, who had come out from New Hampshire. The Woods had three children, Carleton, Percy, and Allie (Mrs. John Egan). James A. Wood, Harvey's brother, also resided at the Ferry.



