

Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society

Volume L

January 2002

Number 2

THE ITALIANS OF CALAVERAS COUNTY

by Mary Alice Sanguinetti

Vallecito, California is a scattering of houses along a few irregularly platted lanes, but during and after the gold rush it and other Calaveras County communities were home to many Italian immigrant families. Today we can read the names of these Italian immigrants in cemeteries, and from the pages of the manuscript census we catch a glimpse of their

lives. Their descendants have spread from this mining county throughout the west.

Analysis of census data for Calaveras County from 1860 to 1900 demonstrates a large Italian presence before the beginning of mass emigration from Italy to the United States (see Table 1). During the rest of the century while Calaveras County's other



Sanguinetti store in Vallecito owned by Luke Sanguinetti from the early 1890's until his death in 1920.

Photo courtesy of Mary Alice Sanguinetti.

immigrant groups declined in number Italians continued to immigrate to this region, making them the largest foreign-born population in Calaveras County by 1900 (see Table 2). Census data indicate that while this was initially a very transient population, comprising mostly male miners, there was also a small nucleus of Italian families that remained and increased in number throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. As mining declined some of the Italians who stayed found opportunities in farming, trade and other fields, that tied them to the golden foothills of the Sierra Nevada. Their families joined them, participating in the process of chain migration with wives, brothers, cousins, nieces and nephews joining the first Italian immigrants.¹

The first Italians to settle here, as in most of California, were primarily from northern Italy. On

Table 1. Italian-born in the United States in 1860

	N	Percent
Calaveras County	784	7.45
California	2,805	26.68
New York	1,862	17.71
Louisiana	1,134	10.78
United States Total	10,513	100.00

Sources: Luciano Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, *The Italian Americans* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971), 219-220; California. Calaveras County. 1860 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication M653, roll 57. (Washington: National Archives. Compact Disc, Heritage Quest, 2000)

the long journey from Italy to California's Mother Lode region, literacy was definitely an asset and Calaveras County's Italian immigrants manifested higher literacy rates than the Italian population as a whole. Northern Italy had more schools than southern Italy in the nineteenth century, but even there many men and most women did not learn to read and write. According to one scholar, in 1882 only about 40 percent of those making marriage contracts in northern Italy were literate. The 1860 literacy rate of 82 percent for Calaveras County Italians over twenty years old probably reflects their northern Italian origins and perhaps greater than average ambition and opportunity.²

In the 1850s Italian men were lured to Calaveras County by gold; they probably began bringing their wives and children to California in 1855 when a railroad was completed across the Isthmus of Panama. By 1860 there were twenty-five California-born children with Italian-born mothers living in Calaveras County and ranging in age from infants to four and five-year-olds. Eight other children of Italian parents had been born in New York and Pennsylvania and there were a few older Italian-born children.³

When people establish homes in new regions they commonly seek neighbors who share their background. In his study of Grass Valley and Nevada City during the Gold Rush era, Ralph Mann found that most miners lived with others from the same state or region.⁴ Similar patterns are found among the Italian miners in Calaveras County in 1860. Of the 715 men born in Italy, two-thirds were living in

Table 2. The Population of Calaveras County

Census	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900
Total population	16,299	8895	9094	8882	11,200
Total foreign born white	9346	2787	2329	1999	2217
Number of Italian-born	784	437	411	363	513
Percent of Total Population	4.8%	5%	4.5%	4%	4.5%
Percent of foreign-born white	8.3%	15.7%	17.6%	18.2%	23.1%

Sources: *Population of the United States in 1860*, 28; California. Calaveras County. 1860 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication M653, roll 57.; *A Compendium of the Ninth Census*, 89-90; California. Calaveras County. 1870 United States Census. Population Schedule. Micropublication M593, roll 70; [*Census Reports*] *Tenth Census. June 1, 1880*, 382; California. Calaveras County. 1880 United States Census, Population schedule, Micropublication T9, roll 63-64; *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890*, 69, 403, 612; *Census Reports: Prepared Under the Direction of Le Grand Powers*, 11,75, 495,575, 738-739; California. Calaveras County. 1900 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication T623, roll 115.

dwellings with only Italian-born men. Of the thirty-four Italian-born men with wives in Calaveras County in 1860, seven were married to non-Italian-born women; three had Irish wives while the other four were married to women from Germany, France, Maryland and Mexico.

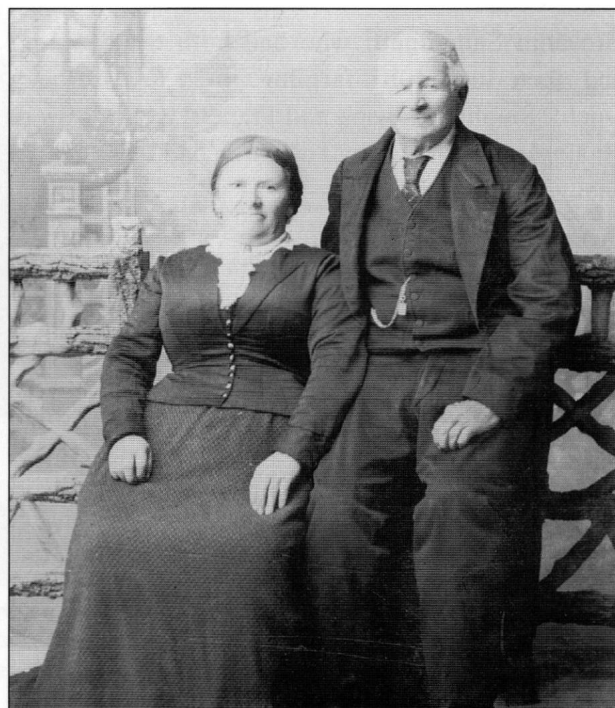
As mining declined after 1858, the size of the Italian population and the county's total population both decreased. Vagaries of orthography and inexact ages make it difficult to trace individual miners from one census to the next ten years later; not surprisingly, it appears that very few of the single Italian miners listed in the 1860 manuscript census were still in Calaveras County in 1870. Some may have gone to mines in Amador or Tuolumne County, to other mining counties in California, or to more distant gold strikes. Others may have decided that San Francisco offered more opportunities or returned to Italy. However, the number of women and families increased so that by 1870 there were nearly twice as many Italian-born women as in 1860 and in 1880 there were three times as many (see Table 3). The Italians who stayed had sent, or returned to Italy, for wives, and more families had immigrated. By 1870 Calaveras County had nearly five times as many children born in California to Italian parents as there were ten years earlier (see Table 4).

Six families can be identified in both the 1860 and 1870 censuses; there were also three single

Table 3. Italian-born males and females of all ages

	Males		Females		Total
	N	%	N	%	
1860	750	96	34	4	784
1870	371	85	66	15	437
1880	305	74	106	26	411
1900	374	73	138	27	512

Sources: California. Calaveras County. 1860 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication M653, roll 57; California. Calaveras County. 1870 United States Census. Population Schedule. Micropublication M593, roll 70; California. Calaveras county. 1880 United States Census, Population Schedule, Micropublication T9, roll 63-64; California. Calaveras County. 1900 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication T623, roll 115.



Rosa and Giovanni Sanguinetti, great grand parents of the author. Photo courtesy of Eunice Carlov.

men who were in Calaveras County in 1860 and had married by 1870. In many other cases surnames found in the 1860 census were repeated in the 1870 census but the family constellation is different or given names and ages do not match. Four of the persistent families were those of Italian-born merchants, B.R. Prince, John Peirano, John Arata and Dominic Cavagnaro. The other two families were those of Antonio Figaro and

Table 4. California-born children with Italian-born Fathers

Ages	1860	1870	1880	1900
Infant – 4 years old	29	65	95	107
5 – 9 years old	1	60	86	87
10 – 14 years old	0	22	58	93
Total	32	147	239	287

Sources: California. Calaveras County. 1860 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication M653, roll 57; California. Calaveras County. 1870 United States Census. Population Schedule. Micropublication M593, roll 70; California. Calaveras County. 1880 United States Census, Population Schedule, Micropublication T9, roll 63-64; California. Calaveras County. 1900 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication T623, roll 115.

Giovanni Sanguinetti who had both tried mining and then turned to farming. In 1860 Lorenzo Oneto, Stephen Canepa and Francis Lupardo were all single miners. By 1870 all three had married and changed occupations.

These families illustrate several different patterns of family formation and of immigration from Italy to California. B.R. Prince and Francis Lupardo were single when they immigrated; they married women from Ireland and France after reaching California. Dominic Cavagnaro and John Arata probably brought their wives with them; except for an older son of Cavagnaro who was born in New York, their children were born in California. Antonio Figaro, his wife Rosa and their daughter Caroline were all born in Sardinia; they immigrated first to Pennsylvania where another daughter, Anna, was born, before coming to California. Giovanni and Rosa Sanguinetti, and their daughter Carolina immigrated directly from Italy to California. In 1860 Lorenzo Oneto and Stephen Canepa were sharing a dwelling with Lorenzo's brother, John, and fifty-four-year-old Andrew Oneto, who may have been their father; all are listed as miners in the census. By 1870 Lorenzo had married an Italian-born woman named Madelena who had immigrated with her

parents and Stephen Canepa had married Carolina Sanguinetti.⁵ There is nothing to tell us today about the social networks between these families; we can only wonder if they came to California together from the same village, or if they met while traveling or after they reached California. However, the pattern evident here, of turning from mining to farming, continued for the rest of the century.

Mining was the dominant economic activity in Calaveras County throughout the second half of the nineteenth century; however, during the four decades after 1860, as gold production declined, hundreds of Italian men mined briefly and then left, or found other kinds of work. While the number of Italian-born women and families increased, the number of Italian-born miners decreased. (see Table 5: Occupations of Italian-born men.) In the 1860s, and 1870s the gold miners were probably employed by corporations with hydraulic mining operations; later they worked in quartz mines. Quartz mining started slowly in Calaveras County, and the census listed only twenty-eight Italians as quartz miners in 1870. By the end of the century, however, quartz mining was prospering and many recent immigrants worked in the mines; these miners continued to include many Italians. By this time Italian immigration to the United States had

Table 5. Occupations of Italian-born Males in Calaveras County

Occupation	1860		1870		1880		1900	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Miners	81.4	611	63.1	234	53.8	164	45.5	170
Merchants	7.7	58	6.7	25	7.9	24	2.4	9
Saloon Keepers	0.9	7	4.3	16	0.7	2	2.1	8
Total Merchants, Saloon Keepers	9.3	65	11.0	41	8.2	26	4.5	17
Farmers, Gardeners, Ranchers	2.4	18	10.5	39	12.4	38	13.9	52
Farmers and Garden Laborers	0.4	3	2.4	9	3.9	12	5.6	21
Total in agriculture	2.9	22	12.9	48	16.3	50	19.5	73
Unskilled Labor	0.3	2	3.5	13	10.2	31	12.2	46
Other	3.7	28	4.3	16	6.2	19	12.9	47
Unknown or Unemployed	2.3	22	5.1	19	4.9	15	5.6	21
Total		750		371		305		374

Sources: California. Calaveras County. 1860 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication M653, roll 57; California. Calaveras County. 1870 United States Census. Population Schedule. Micropublication M593, roll 70; California. Calaveras County. 1880 United States Census, Population Schedule, Micropublication T9, roll 63-64; California. Calaveras County. 1900 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication T623, roll 115.

greatly increased and many more of the later immigrants came from central and southern Italy. Census data do not indicate if the later Italian miners in Calaveras County were from southern or northern Italy.

Agriculture was the field in which the number of Italians most consistently increased during these decades, while the number of merchants declined and the number of saloon keepers fluctuated. The number of farmers, gardeners, and farm or garden laborers had more than doubled by 1870, from twenty-two to forty-eight, and continued to increase for the rest of the century. Many of the Italians raised fruit and vegetables which were sold both to the miners and in the growing city of Stockton. A few Italian merchants prospered and their stores and newspaper ads were visible evidence of the Italian presence while others stayed in business only briefly.

Although less visible in government, at least one Italian ran for a local office – that of constable. It was not a highly contested election. In 1890 the *Calaveras Weekly Citizen* reported, “N. Cavagnaro and Wm. O. Toon have announced themselves as candidates for Constables. Both are too well known to our readers in this township for us to say much. There are two to be elected here and we venture to say Toon and Cavagnaro will be the lucky ones, as they are the only ones announced.”⁶ Another served as a Justice of the Peace in the late 1880s.⁷

Italians participated in Calaveras County’s increasing economic diversity as mining declined. Individual Italians found occupational niches as ferry owners, stage coach drivers, livery stable proprietors, blacksmiths, shoemakers, barbers and keepers of boarding houses and hotels. This occupational diversity allowed them to maintain economic stability while ethnic groups engaged in more narrowly defined occupations, such as the Jewish merchants, left when the population began declining.⁸

Census data provide limited information about immigrant culture and social life. From rates of literacy, school attendance, citizenship and intermarriages with other groups, we can only glimpse cultural and social patterns. There are no known records of how



The house in which the Sanguinetti and Canepa families lived for a few years in the 1860's. The house was built over the boundary between the two families' land (see *Las Calaveras*, April 1966.)

Photo courtesy of Mary Alice Sanguinetti.

these immigrants felt about being surrounded by other cultures or about difficulties with a new language and different customs. Living in a rural environment probably meant less change for those Italians who farmed than for others who had moved to urban areas but they were still surrounded by a foreign language and unfamiliar culture.⁹ When families are transplanted into an alien culture they begin a process of cultural modification encouraged by the new environment.

While familiar crops could be grown and traditional foods cooked at home, there were constant reminders of the new culture. Schools were one of the first places where children of immigrants became acquainted with the different cultures of their neighbors and learned English. In 1860 there were fourteen public schools in Calaveras County but only one Italian child attended school that year. Most of the children were young and the few schools may have been at some distance from their homes. By 1870 approximately three-quarters of the county’s children were in school, and among them were fifty-three children of Italian parents, ranging in age from four to sixteen; another sixty-one children in the same age range were not in school. Language and distance from schools may have been reasons children did not attend school.¹⁰ In ten of the fifteen Italian families whose school-age children were not attending school, both parents were literate. The proportion of children

attending school varied greatly by township. With only one exception, those under seventeen who were not in school were not working.

By acquiring American citizenship Italian men confirmed their connection to their new country. Italians in Calaveras County were more likely than those in the San Francisco area to become citizens. Consular reports in the 1860s and 1870s reported that few immigrants had become American citizens and when *La Voce del Popolo* encouraged Italians “to naturalize in order to have the right to vote” the response was negative. The 1910 census showed that only 15 percent of the Italians in California were citizens. However by 1870 almost 43 percent of the Italians in Calaveras County had been naturalized; this rate had increased to 53 percent by 1900. Since naturalization rates were highest among farmers, gardeners, merchants, and saloon keepers there may have been a relationship between property ownership and citizenship. Over 50 percent of Italian immigrants in these occupations were naturalized while only about 30 percent of miners were naturalized.¹¹

Local newspapers reported that the Italians were eager to become citizens and to vote. According to the *San Andreas Independent*, “No class of Europeans are more ready to become citizens of the United States than the Italians,” and the *San Andreas Register* reported that “When the polls were opened at this precinct almost the first man that voted was an Italian, and they rolled in, in a continued line till

nearly noon.”¹² Possibly, having come farther, and in some cases having brought families with them, more of the Calaveras County Italian immigrants expected to stay in California rather than return to Italy, as the later San Francisco Italians did, and American citizenship expressed their connection to their new country.¹³

Marriage to those of other immigrant groups and to the native-born is one sign of cultural assimilation.¹⁴ The earliest Italian miners found no single Italian-born women in California; they could marry other immigrant or native-born women or return to Italy for wives. In later years they married the daughters of Italian immigrants as well as non-Italian women. Their children grew up with multicultural classmates and companions. By 1900 approximately one third of both first and second generation Italians were married to non-Italians. With the high male/female sex ratio Italian men were more likely to marry non-Italian women than Italian women were to marry non-Italian men (see Table 6).

Half a century after the gold rush, where once hundreds of single Italian miners sought gold there were Italian immigrant families participating in the economic diversity of a turn-of-the-century California mining county. The Italian population was represented by a continuum which ranged from the earliest immigrant families and their descendants through immigrants who had arrived in each succeeding

Table 6. Intermarriage of First and Second Generation Italians

	1860	1870	1880	1900
N	68	138	228	346
Husband and wife both Italian-born	79%	87%	79%	61%
Husband Italian-born, wife other	29%	13%	19%	34%
Wife Italian-born, husband other	0%	0%	2%	5%
Second Generation				
N	0	0	4	98
3-4 parents Italian-born	0%	0%	100%	71%
1-2 parents Italian-born	0%	0%	0%	29%

Sources: Calaveras County. 1860 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication M653, roll 57; California. Calaveras County. 1870 United States Census. Population Schedule. Micropublication M593, roll 70; California. Calaveras County. 1880 United States Census, Population Schedule, Micropublication T9, roll 63-64; California. Calaveras County. 1900 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication T623, roll 115.

decade, to the most recent immigrants who were attracted to the burgeoning quartz mining of the 1890s. While the children of the first Italian immigrants were marrying each other and the children of other immigrants, there were more recent Italian immigrants who represented the mass emigration from Italy to the United States which began in the late 1870s. Many Italian immigrants had stayed in Calaveras County only briefly, but several dozen families put down roots, developed farms and businesses and raised their children. Many authors have written of the Italian's love for his native land which drew him back to Italy despite opportunities in North America, but in the Sierra Nevada foothills were found Italian immigrants who were an exception to many of the dominant patterns of Italian immigration. They found a new land to love and some of their descendants still live in Calaveras County while others are scattered throughout the San Joaquin Valley, San Francisco and the west.

¹ California. Calaveras County. 1860 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication M653, roll 57 (Washington: National Archives. Compact Disc, Heritage Quest, 2000.); California. Calaveras County. 1870 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication M593, roll 70. (Washington: National Archives. compact Disc, Heritage Quest, 2000); California. Calaveras County. 1880 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication T9, roll 63-64. (Washington: National Archives. Compact Disc, Heritage Quest 2000); California. Calaveras County. 1900 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication T623, roll 115. (Washington: National Archives. Compact Disc, Heritage Quest 2000); Luciano J. Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, *The Italian Americans* (New York, N.Y.: Twayne Publishers, 1971), 218.

² Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1982), 23-24, 31-33; Mrs. John P. Lemue, "The John Peirano Family." *Las Calaveras* 14, no. 2 (1966): 4; *A Volume of Memoirs and Genealogy of Representative Citizens of Northern California* (Chicago: Standard Genealogical Company, 1901), 535.

³ California. Calaveras County. 1860 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication M653, roll 57, pp. 2, 13, 89-90, 125, 162, 216-217, 249, 309, 372 .

⁴ Ralph Mann, *After the Gold Rush: Society in Grass Valley and Nevada City, California 1849-1870* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1982), 17-18.

⁵ Calaveras County Marriages. Book B: 109, 281 (Salt Lake City: Family History Library, 1987) microfilm 1302999; 1860 United States Census, Population Schedule, 62, 103, 220, 372; 1870 United States Census. Population Schedule, 175, 240, 244, 312; Eva Soracco, "The Colombo Hotel, Once a San Andreas Landmark." *Las Calaveras* 35, no. 1 (1987): 41, 43.

⁶ "Constables," *Calaveras Weekly Citizen* September 20, 1890.

⁷ Calaveras County Marriages. Book D, 265, 311, 383.

⁸ Joseph Giovinco, "The Ethnic dimension of Calaveras County History" (Calaveras Heritage Council, 19, 30-32.

⁹ Cinel, 10-11.

¹⁰ David Guinn Kenfield, "A History of Education in Calaveras County, California, 1850-1900," (M.A. thesis, University of the Pacific, 1955), 26; California. Calaveras County. 1860 United States Census, Population Schedule. Micropublication M653, roll 57; California. Calaveras County. 1870 United States Census. Population Schedule. Micropublication M593, roll 70.

¹¹ Cinel, 279; California. Calaveras County. 1870 United States Census. Population Schedule. Micropublication M593, roll 70; California. Calaveras County. 1900 United States Census. Population Schedule. Micropublication T623, roll 115.

¹² Cinel, 248-249; Giovinco, 20-21.

¹³ Cinel, 46-47.

¹⁴ Richard D. Alba, "Identity and Ethnicity among Italians and Other Americans of European Ancestry." In *The Columbus People: Perspectives in Italian Immigration to the Americas and Australia*, ed. Lydio F. Tomasi, Piero Gastaldo, and Thomas Row, 21-44. (New York, N.Y.: Center for Migration Studies, 1994, 24, 29.

Editor's Note

This issue of *Las Calaveras* is fortunate to have another article contributed by Ms. Mary Alice Sanguinetti of Seattle, Washington. This article is a condensed version of a paper which she prepared as part of her fulfillment of the requirements for a Masters in History from the University of Washington. Ms. Sanguinetti is currently on leave from her job as a librarian while she pursues her Masters which she hopes to accomplish in the near future. For more information on the Italian settlement in the Mother Lode, see *Las Calaveras* January 1999. Ms. Sanguinetti is a descendent of the Meinecke and Sanguinetti families of Vallecito (see *Las Calaveras*, October 2001). She has also prepared extensive histories of the Meinecke and Sanguinetti families which are available at the Historical Society office for review.

In Memorium

With great sadness the Historical Society notes the passing of life long Angels Camp resident Cornelia B. Stevenot. Mrs. Stevenot was born in 1908 and passed away in October 2001. She had been a kindergarten teacher in Angels Camp for 21 years. She faithfully read each issue of Las Calaveras and often provided information and recollections to the editor. She will be missed by all who were fortunate enough to know her.

Calaveras County Historical Society

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

Officers and Directors

President	David Studley, Mountain Ranch
Vice President	Joan Donleavy, Valley Springs
Treasurer	Ron Randall, Valley Springs
Secretary	Rosemary Faulkner, Jackson
Directors	Shirley Huberty, San Andreas
	Bob Woods, Mountain Ranch
	Lynn Miller, San Andreas
	Beverly Burton, San Andreas
Honorary Director	Willard P. Fuller, Jr., San Andreas
Bookkeeper	Shirley Huberty, San Andreas
Las Calaveras	Bonnie Miller
Office Manager	Elizabeth Braydis
Resource Coordinator	Cate Culver

Las Calaveras is published quarterly by the Calaveras County Historical Society. A subscription to *Las Calaveras* comes with membership in the Calaveras County Historical Society for \$16.00 per year. Non-members may obtain copies from the Historical Society office. The original historical material presented in *Las Calaveras* is not copyrighted and anyone is invited to use it. Mention of the source would be appreciated. Contributions of articles about Calaveras County is appreciated and may be submitted to the Historical Society for consideration.

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.

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 museum 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.

Museum Donations

The Calaveras County Historical Society wishes to thank the following persons who recently made donations to the Calaveras County Museum:

October 2001

Kenneth Holt

Cash donation

Wally Motloch, Mountain Ranch, CA

History of Mountain Ranch

Don Conklin, San Andreas, CA

4 birds: Barn Owl, Great Horned Owl, Kestrel, Wood Duck

Alice Hoepfer, San Andreas, CA

2 photos of George Hoepfer

Don Souza, Sheep Ranch, CA

2 bottles

Berneice A. Spence, Valley Springs, CA

Jenny Lind Book

Rosemary Faulkner, Jackson, CA

6 photos of Mountain Ranch

Colma Historical Association

Pat & Dave Hatfield, Colma, CA

2 Folios of Big Trees quadrangle

David Studley, Mountain Ranch, CA

Flag Pole

Amador County Archives

Larry Conetto

Photo of Schaad's Mill

Don Ball, Canyon Country, CA

Cash donation

November 2001

Geri Demos, Mountain Ranch, CA

2 doilies

Thomas Lennon Films, New York, NY

Cash donation

NEW MEMBERS

The Calaveras County Historical Society welcomes the following new members:

Bob Pence • Sutter Creek
Barbara Comfort • Murphys
Patricia Nash • Santa Clara

Due to recent complications with the membership records, the above list may not be complete. The Historical Society apologizes for any errors and appreciates the patience of our new members.