



Las Calaveras

Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society
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Volume XLV

Number 2



OLD JAIL YARD...see page 26

Calaveras County Historical Society

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San Andreas, California 95249

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The Calaveras County Historical Society, a non-profit corporation, meets on the fourth Thursday of each month in various communities throughout the county, locations of which are announced in advance. Dinner meetings also are announced in advance.

The Society's office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 4 pm. The telephone number is (209) 754-1058. Visitors are welcome. The Society also operates the Calaveras County Museum which is open daily from 10 am to 4 pm in the historic county courthouse at 30 Main St., San Andreas.

MEETING SCHEDULE

Dinner meeting, 7 pm, January 23, Valley Springs Veterans Hall. Tri-tip-in-a-barrel, by the Joses family, \$11.00. Guest speaker, George Hoeper, author and editor of **Las Calaveras** will speak on "Black Bart."

Dinner meeting, 7 pm, February 27, San Andreas Grange Hall. Program to be announced.

Dinner meeting, 7 pm, March 27, Rossetti's Restaurant in Wallace. Program to be announced.

OUR COVER PHOTO

Looking West across Calaveras County's historic jail yard in San Andreas, toward rear of old county courthouse and jail. Today's landscaped scene with its flagstone walks, shrubs, trees and flowers, presents a vastly different view from that of a century ago when it was only a bleak and barren enclosure in which men had died.

NEW MEMBERS

The Calaveras County Historical Society welcomes the following new members:

Charlis Valente, San Andreas, CA.
Sierra Railway Historical Society, Jamestown, CA.
Mary Dudley Snow, Worden, IL.
Bill & Negina Fletcher, Castro Valley, CA.
Kevin J. Ballard, Murphys, CA.
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Viola Edwards, Burson, CA.
Lori Fraguero, Murphys, CA.
Bill & Beverly Ratterman, San Andreas, CA.
Michael & Anne Flock, San Andreas, CA.
Raymond Crosby, Angels Camp, CA.
Diana Tilley, Murphys, CA.
Lonnie Tryon Ratzlaff, Citrus Heights, CA.
Joe Hernandez, Redding, CA.

MUSEUM DONATIONS

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

Howard C. Lewis, Stockton, CA: Cash donation.

Christina U. Hunt, Goleta, CA: Cash donation.

Darrell Brandon, Mountain Ranch, CA: Photo of his painting of Fricot Mansion.

Kenneth Hauselt, Murphys, CA: Cash donation.

Richard Casey, Lockeford, CA: Cash donation.

Mr. & Mrs. Richard Cooper, Lafayette, CA: Copies of Siskiyou Pioneer year book, Butte Co. Historical Society's "Diggins" and other publications.

Janet Hart, San Andreas, CA: Ash tray from Blewett's cafe, copy of Tuolumne County 1850-1975 Special Edition.

Dick & Nancy Hansen, Murphys, CA: Cash donation.

Carol Bennett, Los Angeles, CA: Cash donation.

IN MEMORIAM

Donald Casey, Jamestown, CA., October 8, 1995

Colleen Blue Casey, Sacramento, CA., November 5, 1995

THE CALAVERAS HOTEL WAS HOME TO MANY

By
George Hoeper

Every area of the gold country during the latter part of the 19th and early part of the 20th Century had a leading hostelry favored by locals and travelers alike.

The historic Sonora Inn still serves residents and visitors to Tuolumne County. Jackson and Nevada City have their National Hotels. Auburn had its widely respected Freeman Hotel and Placerville, (Hangtown) its Raffles Hotel. Downieville's St. Charles Hotel became a Sierra County institution.

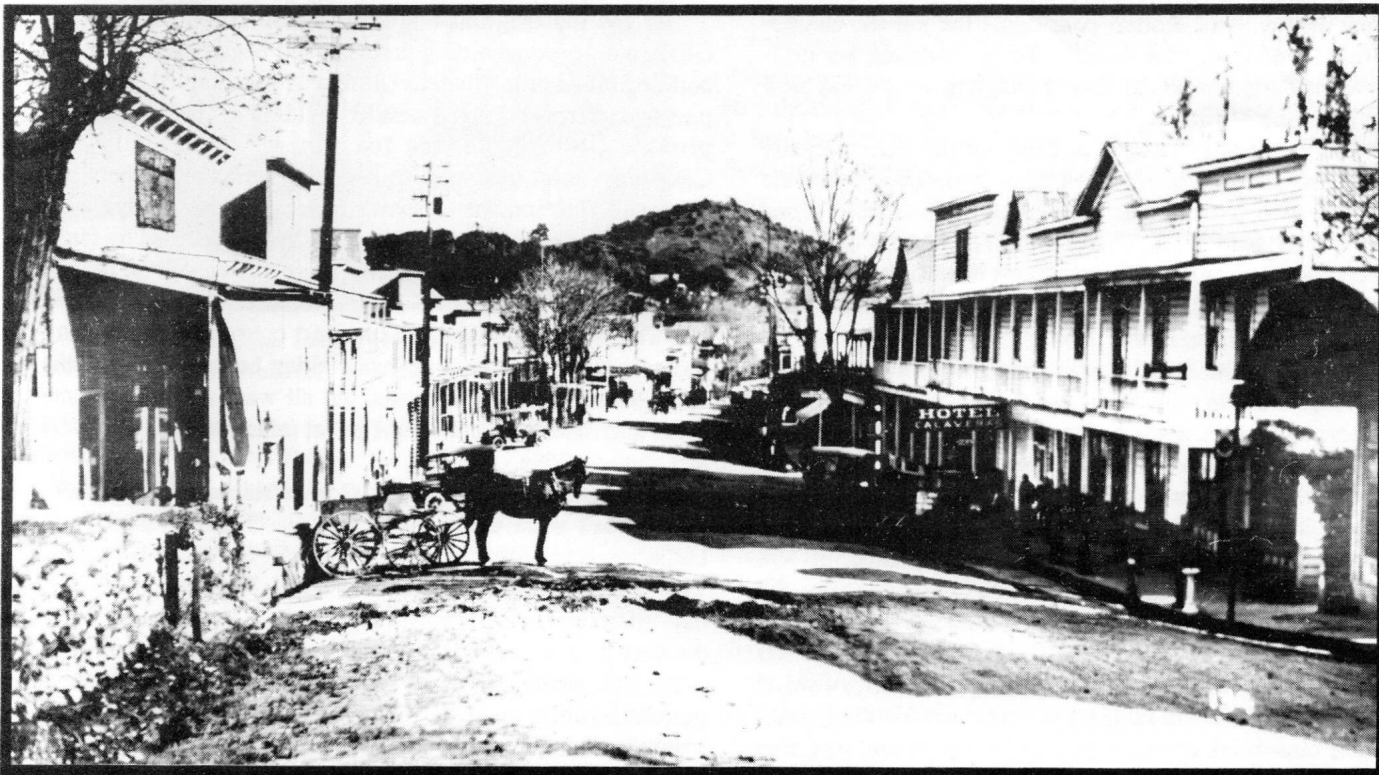
From an inauspicious beginning in 1888 until it was destroyed by fire 50 years later, Angels Camp's Calaveras Hotel enjoyed a reputation for hospitality that stretched from Alaska to the Orient. First known as the River House, a boarding establishment for miners at Main and Hardscrabble Streets, the Calaveras Hotel after 1888, under the ownership of Olivia "Grandma" Rolleri, grew until it occupied virtually the entire block.

The daughter of gold rush miner Giovanni Antonini,

Olivia was a strong minded young woman of 17 in 1861 when she balked at family custom by refusing to marry a man to whom her father had pledged her hand. Instead, she married Gerolamo Rolleri, of Tuolumne County, who like her father was a gold miner. During the next two decades Rolleri supported his growing family by mining, ranching and store keeping—at times by a combination of all three—but none of his endeavors met with any great success. He tried truck gardening near Sonora and one night rustlers stampeded a herd of cattle through his garden. He opened a general store at Moccasin Creek and a bandit gang, said to have been led by the bloody outlaw, Tiburcio Vasquez, plundered it. He and his wife while attempting to recover, had the establishment destroyed by fire.

During that 20 years, 13 children, two of whom died in infancy, were born to Gerolamo and Olivia Rolleri. Then, around 1880 the family moved to Reynold's Ferry on the Calaveras County side of the Stanislaus River. The older boys, including 19-year-old Jimmy Rolleri, operated the ferry which served traffic traveling between Sonora, Copperopolis and Milton. Olivia and her daughters ran the small hotel there and Gerolamo continued to follow mining. At that time in addition to their mother and father, the Rolleri family consist-

Please see **HOTEL**, pg. 18



For half-a-century Grandma Rolleri's Calaveras Hotel (right) provided a haven for Angels Camp visitors and locals alike.

HOTEL, cont. from pg. 17

ed of six boys, John, James, Domingo, Charles, William and Andrew. Daughters included Louise, Mary, Matilda, Amelia and Adeline. All were industrious and hard working.

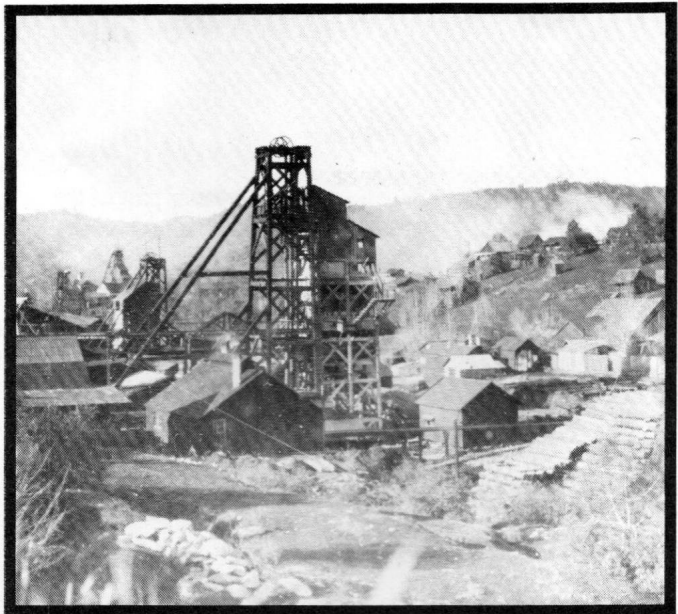
That the Rolleris always were capable of ingenuity was demonstrated in 1881 as Mary, the eldest Rolleri daughter, was only minutes away from becoming the bride of John Podesta, of Yankee Hill, during a ceremony at Reynold's Ferry. At the last moment it was discovered that the marriage license issued in Tuolumne County was not valid in Calaveras County where the wedding was to take place. But, out of the excitement and confusion came an answer. The wedding party boarded the ferry which was pulled to mid-stream—which was the Calaveras-Tuolumne County line—and with family and friends standing on shore, looking on, the marriage ceremony was conducted.

It was while the family was operating the ferry and hotel in November, 1883 that the stage robber Black Bart spent the night there and that young Jimmy Rolleri, the following day, wounded the notorious bandit as he was in the act of robbing the Sonora-Milton stage. And out of the incident, which resulted in Wells Fargo offering Jimmy a job as shotgun guard, came a demonstration of the control Olivia Rolleri exerted over her family. As badly as the family could have used the money, Mrs. Rolleri considered the job too dangerous, forbid Jimmy to take the job, and he accepted her decision. Wells Fargo presented Jimmy with a new rifle that blew up the first time he fired it.

But life abruptly changed in 1888 for the Rolleri family when Gerolamo Rolleri, who had been engaged in hydraulic mining, died of pneumonia. Olivia Rolleri suddenly found herself a widow in her mid-40's with 11 children and little money. Seeking an income to support her family, she purchased an Angels Camp boarding house which she soon renamed the Calaveras Hotel.

Purchase of the boarding house proved a sound investment. Angels Camp's deep mines, the Utica, Stickle, Lightner and others had struck new ore shoots, were expanding and hiring miners who had to have a place to live. With true Italian industry Olivia, who in late years was known by everyone in town as "Grandma" Rolleri, began operating the boarding house at the corner of Main and Hardscrabble Streets.

She did the cooking, turning out sumptuous meals, and directed every phase of operations, aided by her sons and daughters. Although she had no business background she quite competently handled the purse strings. Quickly, word of the fine meals and warm hospitality found at the Rolleri establishment circulated through Angels Camp. Soon, not only men employed in the mines, but women also were among those seeking lodging there. The female guests included school teachers and young women employed in the telegraph



The Lightner Mine, "just up the street" from the Calaveras Hotel, employed many of its permanent guests.

office.

When the original boarding house filled to capacity Olivia purchased adjoining property and began expanding her building into a proper hotel. Ultimately it contained 50 rooms plus two apartments and a smaller building behind the hotel to provide additional space for miners. Eventually, the Calaveras Hotel took up virtually the entire block between Bush and Hardscrabble Streets. Several rooms always were kept open for transients and the others were occupied by family and permanent guests. Usually, there were about 30 permanent boarders.

The hotel when fully expanded contained two dining rooms, one for the transients and visiting businessmen and the other for the permanent guests, but all were served the same food, and diners in both rooms ate at tables with cloth covers and cloth napkins.

The hotel boasted a rather elegant saloon. The bar tenders always wore white shirts, ties, vests and white aprons. Ladies never stepped into the bar-room. Should a lady guest wish a drop of sherry or port or a hot toddy on a cold winter day, someone would knock on the inside door leading from the dining room to the saloon and give the bartender her order. If the lady wishing the drink was one of Grandma's friends, a grandchild often was sent to knock on the door and inform the bartender that "Grandma wants you in the parlor." The lucky youngster was usually rewarded with a lemonade.

Expansion of the hotel included installation of indoor bathrooms on each floor. Electricity came to Angels Camp in

1898 from a generation plant near Murphys, and the Calaveras Hotel was among the earliest to take advantage of it. When the Sierra Railroad reached the city in September, 1902, the hotel began sending a surrey to the depot each day to meet the train. In latter years the surrey was replaced by a small gas-line engine powered bus.

The hotel lobby contained a long, partitioned desk for visiting businessmen and drummers (sales representatives) to sit and work on their accounts or reports. At election time the hotel also served as a precinct voting place. The Calaveras Hotel was always busy, but its parlor was the real gathering place for family and hotel guests alike. In winter everyone would gather around the big wood stove. Grandma Rolleri purchased a piano and if someone was present who could play, everyone would sit around listening or singing along. More than one romance blossomed there among the young men and women who were permanent guests. Mrs. Rolleri loved those gatherings. Children were always welcome and women arriving from the ranches for a day of shopping left babies with Grandma at the hotel.

No one ever was turned away hungry from the Calaveras Hotel. If a man was broke while waiting for a job to open up at one of the mines he could eat there on credit at the hotel.

Grandma Rolleri also was not unknown to "grubstake" some hard working prospector who felt he had a promising mining claim. Her reputation for generosity spread far beyond the borders of Calaveras County. A visitor in Fairbanks, Alaska, mentioned she was from Angles Camp. The Fairbanks resident to whom she was talking, suddenly began speaking glowingly about the kindness of Olivia Rolleri. She said she and her husband had arrived a few years earlier in Angles Camp, short of funds and looking for work. They took a room in the Calaveras Hotel but had not enough money for both of them to pay for meals. She said her husband paid for a meal in the dining room and was observed by Grandma Rolleri taking the rolls he had been served, back to her in their room. Thinking someone was ill, Grandma investigated and found the problem was a shortage of funds. She insisted that both man and wife eat in the dining room and not worry about money while they looked for work.

As the hotel expanded and Olivia Rolleri became busier she hired two young Chinese cooks and painstakingly taught them to prepare the Italian cuisine for which she had grown famous. One of her cooks, Willie Lee, turned out what were said to be the finest raviolis in the Mother Lode. His raviolis became a favorite dish not only of hotel patrons and the Rolleri family, but of the townspeople, too. Willie Lee always prepared raviolis for Sunday dinners and each Sunday evening local residents would stand in line at the hotel's kitchen door to buy raviolis to take home to dinner. A five-pound lard pail filled brimming full of raviolis cost 25 cents.



Olivia "Grandma" Rolleri

On week days hotel meals cost 25 cents and on Sundays, 50 cents. There was always a wide choice of foods and transients and permanent guests ordered off a menu that included steak, pork chops, veal and rich stews. The hotel made its own ice cream on Sundays. Also on Sundays, many of the town's families came to the hotel after church to have dinner there. Although there always were transient guests, miners were the backbone of the hotel's clientele.

At the height of its operation when all the mines were running, the hotel prepared as many as 50 lunches each day for miners. Lunch consisted of meat sandwiches and a slab of pie or piece of cake. The lunch boxes, called dinner pails, were large metal receptacles that included a compartment to hold coffee, milk or cooked fruit.

Cornelia Barden Stevenot, granddaughter of Olivia Rolleri, who was raised at the hotel, remembers the line of miners, each carrying his dinner pail, who at the end of each shift came walking down the hill to the hotel from the Utica

Please see **HOTEL**, pg. 20

HOTEL, cont. from pg. 19

Mine.

Gradually, as the Calaveras Hotel expanded, it became more self-sufficient. Grandma Rolleri viewed the hotel operation as she would the operation of a large family home. As she became more affluent she purchased the Marks Ranch and later, the Slab Ranch which still remains under Rolleri ownership. Her sons, John and Domingo raised beef, hogs and poultry that provided meat, eggs, milk and butter for the hotel. Vegetables also were grown on the ranches and her daughters canned them for winter use. Hundreds of quarts of tomatoes were preserved each year. Not only did the ranches provide meat for the hotel, the Rolleris also opened a butcher shop on Main Street.

Although her family helped operate the hotel, Grandma Rolleri always employed one "swamper," a handyman for upkeep and odd jobs. She also employed several housekeepers and waitresses, a laundryman and a woman to do the ironing. Set in brick at the rear of the hotel stood two large caldrons in which sheets and linens were boiled and rinsed. In latter years the hotel had its own refrigeration building. Grandma Rolleri believed in being independent and the hotel purchased only what the Rolleris could not produce. The kitchen staff even made its own mayonnaise.

Her employees, as did her guests and townspeople, admired and loved Grandma Rolleri. Her Chinese cooks made several trips to China while employed at the hotel and apparently while in their native country, were highly complementary of their employer. An American visitor to China told of being asked by an English speaking Chinese if he knew Grandma Rolleri, of Angels Camp.

Grandma Rolleri looked upon her hotel tenants as family. Should one of them be ill or injured she took care of them and nursed them back to health as if they were her own. Many of the miners who lived there considered it their home. One young miner, drafted during World War I, left with his possessions in a hotel pillow case. At war's end he came back to the hotel and returned the pillow case undamaged.

The miners at the hotel followed an almost unbroken routine. After breakfast, wearing their "diggers," they headed for the mines (in later years as the mines provided change rooms and showers, they left their work clothes in the change rooms). But in the early years they showered and changed into their street clothes in a building behind the hotel. Then, during fair weather, each would select a chair, carry it to the hotel porch where they stayed and smoked, read the paper and conversed with passersby. There they remained until the dinner bell rang, then each would carry his chair back to the dining room. In winter they would gather in the parlor or the bar where great stories were told of their various experiences. In latter years there was less conversation because they sat and



**Cornelia Barden Stevenot was reared
in Grandma Rolleri's hotel.**

listened to the radio.

Cornelia Stevenot, born in 1908, daughter of Harry Barden, who married Louise Rolleri, still lives in Angels Camp a stones throw from where the hotel stood. She and her mother and her pharmacist father lived at the hotel when she was growing up, and she vividly remembers life there.

She well remembers Grandma Rolleri, a stout woman during her latter years, who always seemed taller than she really was because she stood very erect. "She enjoyed being at the center of activities and was proud of being the matriarch of her family," said Mrs. Stevenot. She was happiest when all of her friends and relations were gathered around her. Her wearing apparel in addition to her long skirt, always included a waist apron—gingham on week days and a crisp snow white one on Sundays. She spoke with a marked Italian accent and when excited or tired, could be very emotional.

If she fell even slightly ill she was sure she was going to die. She kept her burial clothes laid out in a dresser drawer and instructed family members on the details of her final rites.

But she liked people and liked fun and was never happier than when people gathered around her.

"Holidays were busy times and the hotel would be packed for dinners at Christmas, Thanksgiving and other occasions. The cooks, waitresses and my mother and aunts would be working until midnight preparing for the next day. Also when the holidays arrived relatives from ranches and the surrounding areas—aunts, uncles, cousins and other kin—came in for the big family dinner. There was fun and laughter topped off by good eating. But there was one iron-clad rule at the hotel and that was that the paying hotel guests always were served first," Mrs. Stevenot said.

Most of Angels Camp's big mines had closed by the end of World War I, and gradually, most of the miners moved away. Still, the Calaveras Hotel remained busy and it was considered one of the leading hotels of the Mother Lode.

Grandma Roller died in 1927 at age 83 and the entire county mourned her passing. She had been a loving, patient and kind person who had gone out of her way to help countless people. Her hard work and industrious nature had built the hotel into a county landmark.

The Sierra Railroad halted service to Angels Camp in 1935 and that hurt the town and the hotel to an extent, but the Roller daughters continued to operate it until it burned in 1938, in a fire presumably caused by faulty wiring.

The Calaveras Hotel has been gone for nearly 60 years but the mark it left on Angels Camp still is remembered.

Much of the content of the above article was provided by Cornelia Barden Stevenot and writings by historians Mary Matzek and Otta Leonard..

SCHOOL ALBUMS OFFERED TO OTHER SALES OUTLETS

For the first time since its publication in 1986, the Calaveras County Historical Society's pioneer school album is being offered at a wholesale price for resale purposes to other historical society book stores and gift shops, other museums and commercial book stores.

Titled *An Album of Pioneer Calaveras County Schools*, it is a 131-page, hard cover publication that includes 140 photographs and covers early-day Calaveras County school history, dating back to the 1850's. Included are the histories of 77 individual schools and history of the county's public school system, as well as the role of women in school politics, history of teachers' institutes and a list of early day teachers.

The number of books available is limited. The albums still are available for purchase by individuals at the historical society's courthouse-museum book store at 30 Main Street, in San Andreas, at a price of \$20, plus tax.

JUST WHERE DID THE FAMED FROG JUMP TAKE PLACE?

By
The Editor

Did Mark Twain when he was told the Calaveras Jumping Frog story that rainy afternoon in an Angels Camp saloon have one too many and get his towns mixed up?

Did that now famous contest in which Dan'l Webster, Jim Smiley's champion leaper, was bested by a no-name frog backed by some roving city slicker, occur in San Andreas instead of Angels Camp?



**His ancestor helped make Angels Camp
and Mark Twain famous.**

In the interest of history we quote from the April 19, 1924, edition of Editor-Publisher Clarence Getchell's *Calaveras Prospect* which questions Angels Camp's claim to being birthplace of the sport of frog jumping in Calaveras County.

Certainly, the frog jump tale that flowed from Twain's skillful pen, telling of how a newcomer to the mining camp hornswoggled \$40 out of Smiley, boastful owner of old Dan'l, specifically places the contest in Angels Camp. The Stranger, according to Twain, put his money on a completely unknown frog, hurriedly plucked from a nearby pond. Then when no one was looking, equalized things by pouring birdshot down
Please see FROG, pg. 22

FROG, cont. from pg. 21

old Dan's throat. Wisely, the culprit collected his money and left town before Smiley discovered why ol' Dan'l couldn't jump.

The story tickled the funnybone of a war weary nation and for ever after, in the public's mind, Angels Camp has been where the jumping frog contest was held.

But in 1924, some 60 years after the epic contest supposedly took place, another old timer, son of a Calaveras County 49'er, stepped forward to take exception to Angels Camp's claim to fame. The dissenter was Henry Wesson, who took issue with William Gillis, of Tuolumne County's Jackass Hill, author of an article printed some weeks earlier in the Stockton Independent, which said the frog jump was held in Angels Camp. Gillis may well have been a descendent of one of the



Fred Wesson said it wasn't so.

Gillis brothers (Jim or Steve) of Jackass Hill, with whom Mark Twain spent the winter of 1864-65 and in whose cabin he wrote his famous story of the Calaveras Jumping Frog.

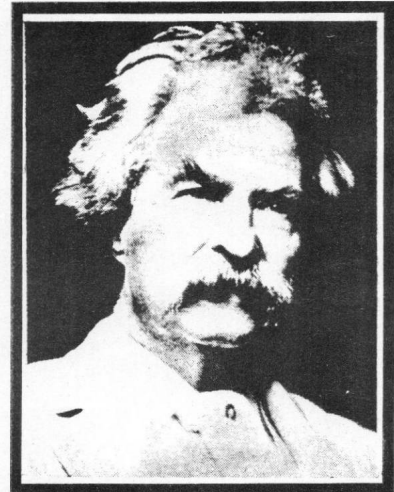
A former newspaperman, Calaveras County Clerk and in later years, owner of a San Andreas saloon, Henry Wesson was the son of George Frederick Wesson, gold rush miner, county official, deputy under Sheriff Ben Thorn and also the owner in San Andreas, of Wesson's Saloon. Henry Wesson, in his rebuttal of Gillis' claim which editor Getchell printed in his April 19, 1924, paper, said the frog jump contest of which Twain wrote occurred not in Angels Camp but in his father's San Andreas saloon, with his father as an eye-witness. The front page story in Getchell's Calaveras Prospect quoted Wesson as follows:

"My father often told the story in my presence and said the frogs were brought to his saloon where the contest was held. It was written up by that famous editor and editorial writer Sam Seabaugh, and the story was published in the San Andreas Independent which later was moved to Stockton and now is the Stockton Independent. Mark Twain later came along and got the idea for his story from the Independent write up, then took credit for the story which later became famous."

Editor Getchell went on to say in his story of April 19, that George Frederick Wesson "was very popular among the sporting fraternity of the County." He added that Wesson always kept several race horses and a number of game chickens, "which was then one of the popular pastimes of the day." In those days, he said, "Wesson's place was a hangout for all the sporting men and there is no doubt but what the frog contest took place in his saloon."

And, according to Getchell's article, Mrs. Kate Cleary, another old pioneer, who had passed away, also took pleasure in talking about the famous frog contest and told friends and relatives many times that she read the story in the Independent when it was first published.

Apparently, both Henry Wesson and Clarence Getchell were completely serious in their contention that the frog jump which Mark Twain wrote about occurred in San Andreas instead of Angels Camp. Getchell went on to say that efforts



Mark Twain.

Did he get his towns mixed up?

REMEMBERING BABE RAGGIO'S COURTHOUSE SALOON

(Note: Much of the information contained in the following article was compiled by writer-newspaper woman Arlene Westenrider, of Angels Camp and by Calaveras County Archivist Lorraine Kennedy.)

Quite probably, Calaveras County's first liquor dispensary was nothing more than a canvas lean-to hastily constructed to shelter a keg of rot-gut whiskey and a tin cup.

A far cry from those first stick and sailcloth contraptions was the elegant Courthouse Saloon built in the mid-1850's on the San Andreas Main street. Despite neglect and countless ownership changes the 140-year-old wood frame structure that once boasted a mahogany bar and mirrored back bar brought by sailing ship 'round the Horn, still stands adjacent to Calaveras County's historic courthouse which now serves as the county museum.

Today few people, resident or tourist, who pass it without a second glance, realize the old building, tight against the courthouse-museum's north wall, was almost as much a part of courthouse life as the Hall of Records itself. More than just a drinking place, the saloon was a gathering spot for the town's businessmen and leaders. Its interior was as familiar to most county officials as were their own offices. And, many were the serious discussions held and decisions reached with the boots of county officialdom resting comfortably on the brass rail of the Courthouse Saloon's bar.

The original structure, older by at least a decade than the county courthouse, was short-lived. First known as the Hugh Mallory Saloon, it was little more than a year old when it sold in February, 1858, to William Livers, but it burned in the disastrous fire which swept San Andreas in June of that year, with a loss to Livers of \$2,000. However, Livers apparently rapidly rebuilt, for in October, 1859, he sold the building to J.K. Doak.

During the ensuing years the saloon continued periodically to change hands, quite possible because there were so many saloons in town that none were too profitable. In 1862 Doak

had been made at various times to locate the old files of the San Andreas Independent, but they apparently had disappeared. He closed his news story with the more than slightly opinionated prediction that "it is certain that when they are found the matter will be definitely settled, just as Mr. Wesson now relates the story."

At least Angels Camp residents can be thankful that Wesson and Getchell did not openly accuse them of making off with the missing newspaper files.



Alphonse "Babe" Raggio

sold to F. Johnson and the following year it was owned by Frederick Schwoerer, who apparently rented it to an Edward Cassiday. In 1867 when the Calaveras County Courthouse and jail was completed beside the saloon, a newspaper article informed readers that Cassiday was operating a "commodious saloon which he had named the Courthouse Exchange."

In 1869 Schwoerer sold the saloon to Giovanni Dasso who operated it until 1885, when he sold it, reportedly for \$650. Then, in 1893 the county courthouse complex was expanded by construction of the Hall of Records which fronted on Main Street and abutted solidly against the south side of the saloon. And, with the new addition to the county buildings the saloon began to take on new life.

An 1894 newspaper story noted that E.B. Moore had newly fitted up the saloon, added a one-room extension to the back of it, and was calling it The Branch. With the new addition to the back of the building, courthouse employees could quietly enter the saloon through its back door. The back room contained several poker tables, and along one wall was a long table where meals were served family style to miners, courthouse employees and townspeople in general. Locals, during the late afternoon would come in through the back door to buy

Please see SALOON, pg. 24



**The Courthouse Saloon bar (later the Raggio Club),
was a gathering place for political and business leaders.**

SALOON, cont. from pg. 23

a bucket of draft beer. A common trick of the beer purchasers was to lightly grease the inside of their buckets with lard to prevent the beer from foaming and could be filled closer to the top.

Although the Courthouse saloon, under the various names it operated during those years was apparently one of the more prosperous of the town's watering holes, Donnelly in 1895 sold it to William A. Wallace. Wallace leased the saloon to the Toon brothers. C.T. Toon managed it and in 1896, built a house on the rear of the lot which extended all the way to California Street. The Toons operated the saloon until November, 1903, when Wallace sold to G. Tiscornia. The saloon remained under ownership of the Tiscornia Company until 1927 when it sold to Alphonse "Babe" Raggio, by far the most interesting and colorful of the old establishment's long string of owners.

The Raggio family, Calaveras County pioneers, had begun operating a stage line in the early 1880's, gradually expanding until by turn-of-the-century their stages were travel-

ing some 230 miles of foothill roads each day.

Under the management of John Raggio the stageline with headquarters in San Andreas, was becoming increasingly competitive and before the century ended it bought out the 40-year-old Matteson Stage Company. Raggio stages were carrying passengers, mail and Wells Fargo Company express boxes to every town and settlement from the rail head at Milton to northern Amador County. But, it was an incident on the San Andreas-Mountain Ranch-Sheep ranch run that changed the life of Babe Raggio and the future of the Courthouse Saloon that would one day be renamed the Raggio Club.

On an April morning in 1892 Babe Raggio, youngest of the Raggio brothers and still in his teens, was driving the stage from San Andreas to Sheep Ranch. Aboard were several passengers and the

payroll for the Sheep Ranch Mine. Beside Raggio rode veteran Wells Fargo guard Mike Tovey, a shotgun across his knees. Suddenly, some two miles east of San Andreas, a masked man stood up and fired a charge of buckshot into the stage.

Two of the heavy shot hit Raggio in the neck and upper body. Tovey was wounded in the arm and 15-year-old Johanna Rodesina was fatally wounded by the blast. The bandit fled and was never captured. Raggio, seriously wounded, eventually recovered, but carried one of the buckshot in his chest the rest of his life.

Incapacitated for a lengthy period while he recovered from the gunshot wounds, Raggio continued working in the family's stage line business, sometimes even driving stage. But, in 1927 Babe Raggio purchased the Courthouse saloon and renamed it the Raggio Club.

Enactment of the 18th Amendment near the end of World War I, which established nationwide prohibition, had closed the town's drinking places, but because of its prominent location coupled with the courthouse foot traffic, the establish-

NEW BOOK TELLS OF MADAM FELIX'S GOLD

ment that had been the Courthouse Saloon, remained open as a pool and billiard parlor, serving meals and soft drinks. Its ornate back bar had long ago been removed, but poker games, some of which lasted three or four days, still flourished. And, it was said that certain of its privileged clientele, late at night, still could partake of adult beverages at the Raggio Club. A bocci ball court behind the building provided entertainment, largely for patrons of Italian descent, who had brought the sport from Italy with them.

The election of President Franklin Roosevelt in 1932 brought an end to prohibition and the old saloon went back to dispensing both on and off-sale liquor. The saloon continued to provide a gathering place for county officials and personnel. At one time, the old saloon displayed 21 mounted deer heads, a golden eagle, a mounted otter, badger, raccoon, a set



The Raggio Club held a prominent spot on San Andreas' Main Street.

of big horn ram horns and a powder horn said to have been left behind by the Donner Party.

In 1939 Raggio leased the saloon to Jim Kent, who made some interior changes and renamed it the Clover Club. Raggio and his wife, living in Long Beach, apparently were not aware of the change. In 1941, Kent moved the liquor license to a newly built Clover Club on West St. Charles Street in San Andreas, that later became the '49 Club.

Babe Raggio returned, found he had a bar and no license and purchased an on and off-sale liquor license from Ruby Taylor, of Rail Road Flat. He reopened the club near the end of 1941, but in 1944, sold the property to Harry and Edna Shaw, of Stockton.

Shaw paid tribute to Babe Raggio's colorful life as a stage

A hundred years ago, the Madam Felix Mining district and the Royal Mine suddenly became big news in Calaveras County. Again, in the late 1980's the Royal Mountain King Mine leaped into prominence, a reminder of that county's long dependence on its mineral resources, of the colorful history of Salt Spring Valley and gold production in its Hodson Hills.

Titled "Madam Felix's Gold", the new book, just out, tells the story of this intriguing valley from its occupation for thousands of years by Native Americans, through the gold rush period, the development of industrial mining and events there up to the present day. Although the book's primary purpose is to record the long history of prospecting and mining, the part played by the Salt Spring Valley ranchers and other residents is treated in detail. Outlined is the life of the memorable pioneer Madam Josephine Felix as well as lives of members of the McCarty, Tower, Dutil, Womble, Blazer, Rowe, Howard, Parks, and other Calaveras Families. The book is profusely illustrated with contemporary photographs as well as with maps and diagrams.

Authored by Calaveras Historical Society members Willard Fuller, Judith Marvin and Julia Costello, the book is published jointly by the historical society and Foothill Resources, Ltd., of Murphys. It may be purchased for \$21.91 (tax included) at the Calaveras County Courthouse Museum in San Andreas or by mail from Foothill Resources, Ltd., P.O. Box 2040, Murphys, CA 95247, for \$21.91 plus \$3.50 handling and mailing, or at local book stores.

driver by having an artist paint on a wall of the saloon, a giant mural of the shooting and attempted stage coach robbery on Mountain Ranch Road.

Warren and Frances Lane purchased the saloon in 1945, and although Warren died in 1957, his wife and son operated it until 1959.

Babe Raggio died in Long Beach in September, 1954, at age 78. The stage robbery mural that once covered an entire wall of the saloon has been painted over, leaving no sign that a liquor establishment ever existed there.

Since then, the old building has continued to change hands. It has served as a newspaper office, gift shop, art and picture framing gallery, and most recently, a wholesale carpet outlet. It has felt the tread of miners' hob-nailed boots and its walls have echoed their laughter. It has heard the conversations of generations of county officials and politicians.

Today, to passersby it is just another weathered Main Street building, but to Calaveras County old timers it will always be the Raggio Club and the Courthouse Saloon.

FLOWERS WILL BLOOM WHERE MEN ONCE DIED

By
The Editor

Thanks to Calaveras County's Master Gardeners the historic stone walled jail yard that encloses the eastern end of this county's courthouse-museum is undergoing an extensive face lift. In cooperation with the Calaveras County Historical Society which manages the courthouse-museum complex, the Master Gardeners have undertaken the general landscaping and improvement of the old yard.

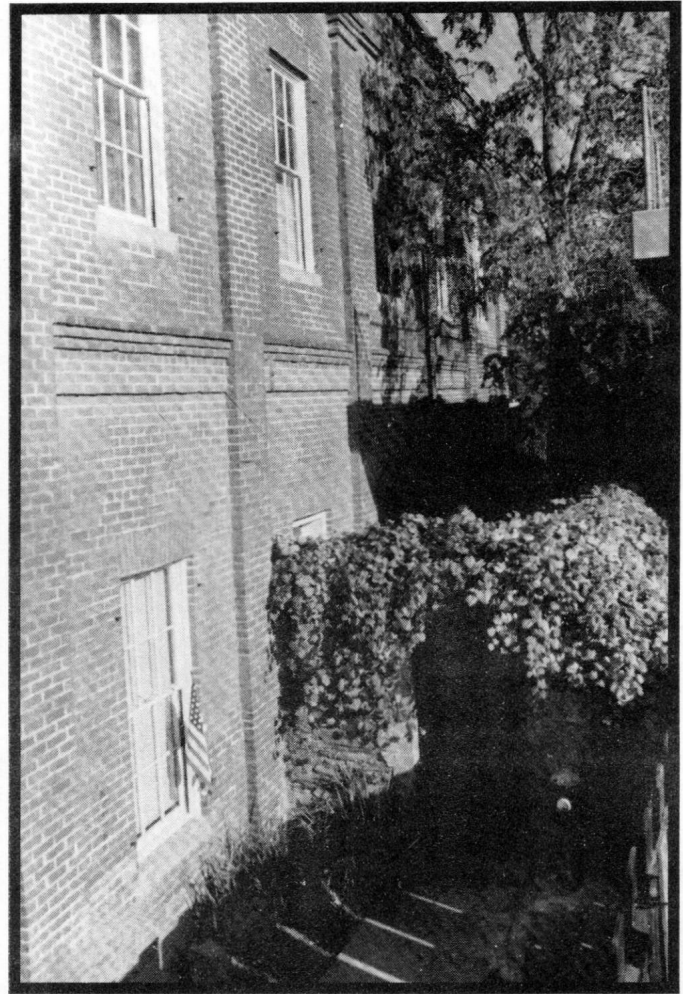
The old jail yard that encloses the east end of the historic red brick courthouse and jail in San Andreas has witnessed more than its share of death and violence. Built to prevent public access to the jail which is housed in the back of the court building and shield activities there from public view, the walled yard originally was simply a plot of barren, sun-baked soil where at least three murderers were hanged, a lawman died and desperate men were confined in cramped dungeons.

Today the carefully landscaped, tree shaded area with flower bordered flagstone walks, rustic benches and native shrubs bears little resemblance to the harsh scene it presented a century ago. And, few visitors realize as they explore the old, mossy walled yard with its ferns, flowers and gold rush artifacts they are treading on ground that contains the unmarked graves of executed criminals or that a young defender of the law died there.

The old jail and the courthouse complex which contains it was built in 1867 when the seat of Calaveras County Government was moved from Mokelumne Hill to San Andreas. However, the stone wall that forms the jail yard was not constructed until nearly 20 years later.

Not that an enclosed area around the jail was unneeded. From the day it housed its first inmates, lack of a wall or fence to limit access to the jail posed an ongoing problem. The open area invited unwanted foot traffic and provided friends of prisoners an opportunity to sneak contraband to them. It was not uncommon for a reveler, arrested for drunkenness or fighting the night before, to be found in his cell next morning drunker than ever, because someone during the night had provided him with another bottle. Also, there was always the danger of someone slipping a weapon or tools with which to effect an escape to some dangerous criminal.

Finally, in 1885 the county board of supervisors approved funds for construction of a wall around the exterior of the jail. On October 3 of that year the Calaveras Prospect reported that: "The stone wall encircling the jail yard had been completed by Edward Fahey. The wall is 302 1/2 feet long and 10 feet high, built of schist rock from a local quarry, bound by

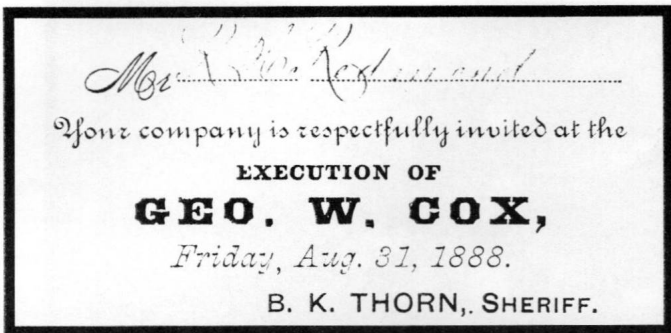


**Vine covered jail yard gate, witness to
a century of sometimes violent history.**

strong mortar. The contract price was \$2,107.30."

Even before the stone wall went up the area fronting the jail had been the scene of at least one or more executions by hanging. In June, 1873, Jose Coyado died on the gallows there for the murder of Elkanah Said, superintendent of the Petticoat Mine at Rail Road Flat, during an attempted robbery. It is not known if Coyado was buried there, but the late George Poore, who for several years served as curator of the courthouse museum, said that at least three executed murderers were buried in the jail yard in unmarked graves.

One of the graves is believed to be that of George Cox, hanged there in 1888 for the shooting of his son-in-law in the old mining town of Sheep Ranch. His was the last execution conducted there. After that, condemned persons were put to death in the state's penitentiaries. When Sheriff Ben Thorn held office he sent out invitations written on his business



**Calaveras Sheriff Ben Thorn
sent invitations to friends**

cards to his friends, political associates and the press, to serve as witnesses at the hangings. Thorn himself served as hangman.

Some 40 years ago, according to at least one San Andreas citizen who wished to remain anonymous, a repair crew called in to fix a leaking water pipe in the jail yard unearthed one of the graves which was quickly covered, and little was said about it. The original wall reportedly only enclosed the rear of the courthouse and entrance to the jail. A 30-foot section of wall which today forms a shaded corridor along the south side of the building was added some years later to protect prisoners being taken from jail to court. That was done, said George Poore, because of threats against at least one accused murderer that he would be shot as he was being moved to the courtroom from his cell.

Despite its antiquity, the old jail remained in use through much of this century. Containing only five small cells, from the day it was built the jail often was overcrowded. To overcome that situation, some time before turn-of-the-century, a pair of underground dungeons, capped with heavy logs and earth were built in the southeastern corner of the jail yard. So small a man could not stand erect in one of them, those cramped, stone lined cribs held inmates in almost total darkness. Considered even in that day cruel and inhumane, they were used only a few years before being replaced by a stout wooden building containing two larger cells built on the same location.

The new cells, completed in 1895 during Sheriff Ben Thorn's regime, were constructed of 2 X 6 planks, laid flat and spiked every four inches. They also were fitted with bars and heavy iron doors. It was in one of those cells in 1909 that Deputy Constable James Casy was shot to death by a drunken prisoner who had sneaked a pistol into the cell with him. Sheriff Joe Zwinge, in 1927, had the badly deteriorated old cells demolished.

The original five small jail cells in the old courthouse building, despite their general inadequacy and lack of plumb-



Old courthouse jail yard. Men once died on gallows here.

ing, continued to house prisoners until replaced in 1962 by the present county jail on Mountain Ranch Road. However, the courthouse itself continued to serve as the seat of county government until the present county government center on Mountain Ranch Road opened in 1967.

For several years after 1962 the old jail and jail yard went unused except for storage of junk and surplus county property. Then, shortly after the county government was moved to its new site, the initial steps were taken to develop the old courthouse complex into a county museum and archives.

First operated by the county under the stewardship of retired civil engineer and former Calaveras Cement Company

Please see **YARD**, pg. 28

YARD, cont. from pg. 27

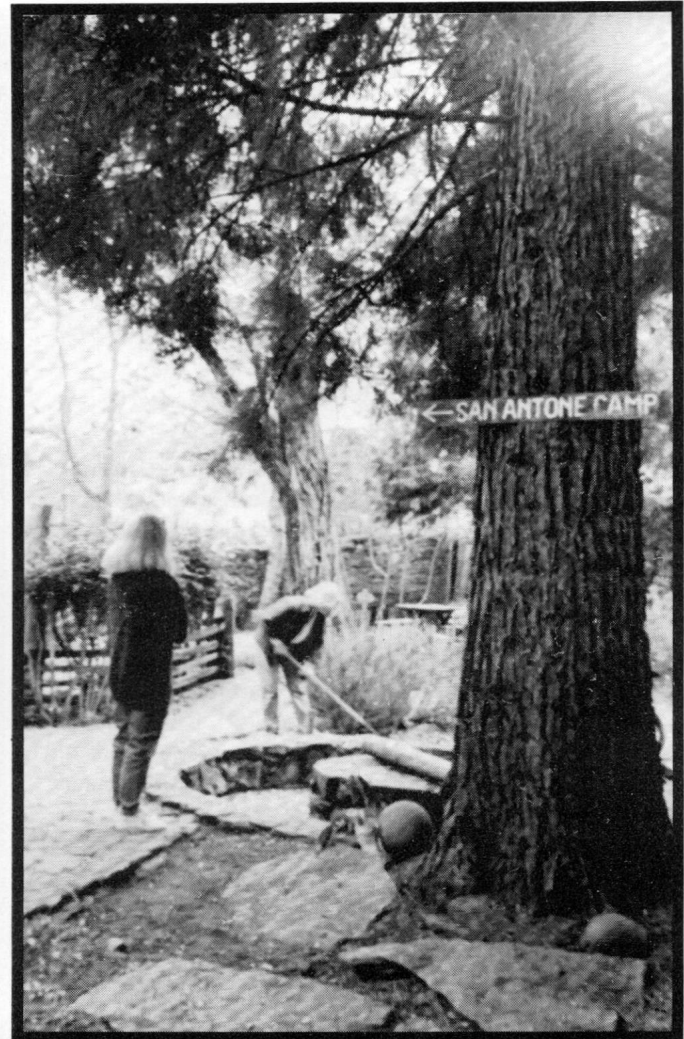
official George Poore, the museum area was confined largely to the second floor of the old County Courthouse and Hall of Records. The county, with Poore serving as curator, continued to operate the museum throughout the 1960's and into the mid-70's, but little was done toward use or improvement of the old jail yard. There was some minor refurbishing of the yard, and some donated mining artifacts, including a Pelton wheel used at the famed Gwinn Mine, were accepted and housed there.

During 1975-76 under authority of the county board of supervisors the deteriorated old courthouse underwent a major restoration. On July 4, 1976, with Mother Lode historian "Coke" Wood as guest speaker, the fully restored old courthouse complex was rededicated. The following year the recently formed Calaveras County Heritage Council, under an agreement with the county board of supervisors, assumed custody and management of the courthouse museum and county archives.

The first major step toward refurbishing the old jail yard occurred in 1977 when a Delta College Landscape Development Class volunteered to landscape and clean it up as a class project. In October of that year 22 students under direction of instructor Mike Schneider devoted several weeks to general improvement of the historic walled area. In addition to trimming existing trees and shrubs, planting new native shrubs and flowers, and a general refurbishing of the area, they brought in several tons of flagstones once used for paving San Francisco streets. With the stone they constructed walks and a small patio area. Later, a small shed in the yard was turned into the replica of an early day mineral assay office.

Then, in the summer of 1988 as the Heritage Council withdrew from operation of the museum complex and archives, the Calaveras County Historical Society signed an agreement with the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors to take over operation of the courthouse museum. The county retained jurisdiction of the archives. The society immediately undertook further improvement of the somewhat neglected jail yard. The old jail, which had been used largely in recent years as a storage area, was cleaned out and opened to the public as part of the museum operation. Historical Society work parties devoted hours to further clean-up of the jail yard. More recently, an authentic stone oven used for cooking and bread baking by a pioneer family in the old mining settlement of Calaveritas, was moved to the jail yard and rebuilt there, where, on occasion, food and bread is baked in it for festive gatherings.

But now, as 1997 arrives, the old jail yard thanks to the county's Master Gardeners, is undergoing further beautification and improvement. Headed by Marcia Wilson, of



Master Gardeners Marcia Wilson and Lennie Beard.

Mokelumne Hill and Lennie Beard, of Glencoe, a group of ten master gardeners are participating in an on-going project that is turning the old mossy walled yard into one of the county's more attractive garden spots.

In addition to plans for more flowers, shrubs and further landscaping, the master gardeners, operating under auspices of the Agricultural Extension Service, also are helping better arrange the displays of mining and industrial artifacts.

Richard Brown, of San Andreas and Peter Stead, of Murphys, are improving the yard's irrigation system and installing timers. Ultimately, explained Wilson and Beard, they would like to develop a walking tour of the yard and courthouse area. How long will this jail yard improvement project continue?

"We've set no time limit," replied Wilson. "We'll continue until we consider the project complete."