

## THE SPANISH FLU IN THE LAND OF SKULLS

*By Noah Berner*

In the fall of 1918, Calaveras County was hit hard by the Spanish flu, arguably the most destructive pandemic in human history.

Scholars still debate where the virus first appeared, but many believe that it arose in Kansas in March of 1918 after passing to humans from a bird species.

Aided by the massive movement of troops during World War I, the virus quickly spread around the world, infecting an estimated one in three people. The pandemic killed an estimated 50–100 million people and between 3–5% of the world's population.

It wasn't just the high death toll that alarmed people at the time. While most influenza epidemics tend to kill the young and old, the Spanish flu more commonly killed those in the prime of life.

Today, experts believe that the high death rate among those aged between 16 and 40 was due to a massive response of the immune system that killed in an attempt to cure.

Those who perished in this manner died quickly, and sometimes with bizarre symptoms like turning blue and coughing up blood that led the public to fear that they were witnessing a return of the Black Death. At the time, there were no effective treatments for influenza or the resulting pneumonia,

which was usually the cause of death. Though certain viruses had been identified, the world's leading scientists knew very little about them. Over the course of the pandemic, most members of the scientific community believed that a bacterium was responsible for the Spanish flu.

In North America, the pandemic hit in three major waves beginning in the spring of 1918, the fall of 1918 and the winter of 1918–19. The first wave was relatively mild, the second extremely virulent, and the third intermediate between the two.

The worst of the first wave of the Spanish flu in the United States was mostly limited to military facilities and nearby urban areas. But the second wave swept over the entire country, leaving almost no community untouched.

Even as the flu raged through U.S. cities and military camps in September of 1918, the county's local newspaper, the Calaveras Prospect, was silent on the issue. However, this was not unusual. During the war, the belligerent countries feared that reporting on the pandemic would decrease morale and incite a panic.

Through government censorship or self-censorship, most newspapers in Europe and the U.S. reported little, if at all, on the outbreak at

first. The pandemic became known as Spanish Flu because Spain was neutral during World War I and its newspapers extensively reported on the crisis in that country beginning with the first wave.

As the second wave of the virus spread, the silence of the press did more to stoke fear than to quell it, and newspapers increased their coverage.

The Prospect first reported on the second wave of the Spanish Flu in a short article on Oct. 5, 1918.

“The call for the entrainment of seven soldiers from Calaveras county on October 7th has been called off by the Adjutant General on account of the epidemic of influenza that is spreading throughout the training camps,” the article reads. “The army doctors have evidently found a remedy for the disease, and have it under control now.”

Missing from the article was the news that the entire round of the draft had been canceled across the country.

By Oct. 19, the optimism of this initial report had proven to be unwarranted.

“The nation-wide epidemic of Spanish influenza has hit this State and is now spreading over the interior towns,” a Prospect article reads. “In San Francisco and Stockton the health authorities have ordered all schools, churches, theatres and places of amusement closed. It is reported that the city of Sonora has placed itself in quarantine as there are several cases there. Reports come from Angels that there is one case there.”

The Stockton Daily Evening Record reported on the situation in Copperopolis on Oct. 24.

“School has been closed for the week on account of Spanish influenza,” an article reads. “There are several cases of the disease in town and precaution is being taken by Dr. Cooper, the mine physician, to prevent its spread.”

The Prospect carried the news that San Francisco had passed an ordinance “making it a misdemeanor with a punishment of 10 days in jail or \$100 fine for not wearing a mask,” and that the governor had requested that all Californians wear masks.

By Oct. 26, the school had been closed and no public gatherings were being held in Mountain Ranch. “We miss the sound of the school bell,” a Prospect correspondent wrote. “No Flu, but no chances.” Though few flu cases in the county had been reported by the Prospect, on Oct. 26 the City of Angels passed an ordinance requiring the wearing

of face coverings in public, and two days later, the county board of supervisors followed suit.

“Every person appearing within the townsite limits of any town, or in any public place where two or more persons are congregated, except in homes, in the County of Calaveras, and every person engaged in the sale, handling, or distribution of foodstuffs, liquors, refreshments or wearing apparel shall wear a mask or covering, except when partaking of meals or refreshments, over the nose and mouth,” the ordinance reads. “Every person who shall violate any of the provisions of this Ordinance shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall be punished by a fine not to exceed fifty dollars, or by imprisonment in the County Jail of the County of Calaveras not to exceed fifty (days), or by both such fine and imprisonment.”

The day that the ordinance was passed, a Prospect correspondent in Murphys reported, “There is quite a scare of the epidemic, and yesterday quite a few donned the flu masks. There are a few cases of influenza but they are very light.... The school has been closed for the present.”

On Oct. 31, the Record carried a dispatch from Mokelumne Hill.

“Although there are no cases of influenza in town so far, still the public school was closed Monday last as a precaution. Now the next thing in order is for the parents to keep their children at home and not let them roam around on the public street,” an article reads. “Quite a number of people have passed through town during the last few days, leaving the places where the influenza was prevalent, and going up into the mountains above us.”

On Nov. 2, the Prospect reported that Postmaster Geo. H. Treat had contracted the first flu case in San Andreas. The same issue also carried a short message from the Prospect’s Mokelumne Hill correspondent. “The Red Cross ladies in this place have been engaged for the past four days in making ‘flu’ masks,” it reads. “They charge five cents apiece for them.”

The Red Cross expanded dramatically over the course of the war—from 107 chapters to 3,864 chapters—and played a leading role in responding to the pandemic.

In the Nov. 9 issue, a Prospect correspondent in West Point reported, “So far we have had no cases of the Influenza. Everybody is seen with a mask on and are doing all they can to prevent the epidemic getting

in our midst. I really think the gentlemen are finding it a pleasure in wearing them, as so many looks as though razors are a thing of the past.”

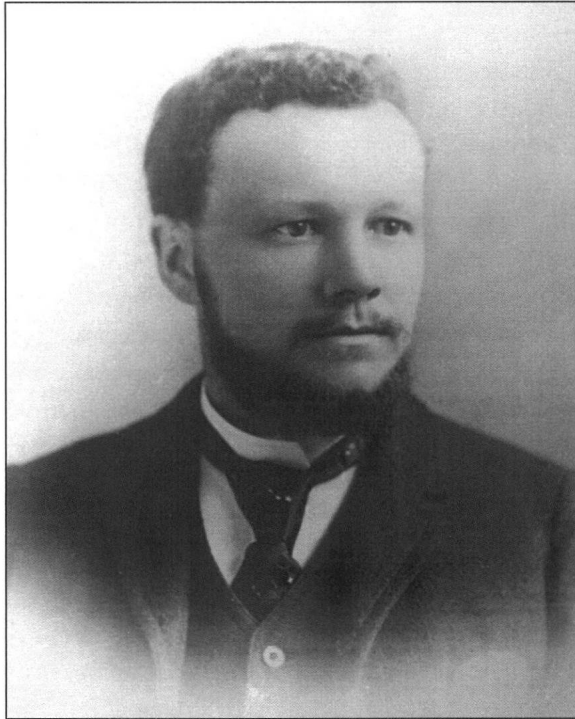
A Nov. 12 letter to the editor from a reader in Melones suggests that the county’s mask ordinance was lightly enforced.

“The authorities appear to think that the fact of having passed such a law is all that was necessary, and that the law would enforce itself,” it reads. “That law is a dead letter, it is a joke. I have this 12th day of November, seen a barber at his occupation, without a mask, several storekeepers and numerous saloon frequenters passing in and out of saloons without masks.”

The board of trustees of the City of Angels met with the board of health in a special session on Nov. 13. “After some discussion it was ordered by the board of health to have removed at once all chairs and card tables from all saloons and pool and billiard halls until further notice as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of the present epidemic of Spanish Influenza,” an article reads. “The City Marshall was instructed to enforce the order at once.”

During the war, the Prospect often printed letters from local soldiers stationed on the Western Front.

“Our regiment is made up entirely of miners, many of whom have worked on the Mother Lode,” one letter reads. “France is a beautiful country behind the lines but the districts which have seen fighting are pretty badly wrecked, but not beyond repair, except some of the older master work, such as churches or cathedrals. However, from all the country I have been through, I think I’ll choose California for mine.” Over the course of September and through the end of the war on Nov. 11, not one letter from Europe printed in the Prospect mentions the Spanish influenza, although the soldiers were likely painfully aware of it. More American soldiers would die of the flu than from battlefield injuries. The omission was likely due to a combination of



**Dr. Elmer Weirich, Angels Camp.**

*Photo courtesy of Calaveras County Historical Society*

the censorship of soldiers’ letters and the young men not wishing to worry their loved ones back home.

On Nov. 16, the public school in San Andreas reopened after having been closed for two weeks, though the paper reported one new case in town.

“Constable Henry F. Zwinge was taken down with the malady and for several days was very low, having a high fever most of the time,” an article reads. “It is reported that there are eight cases at Mokelumne Hill, and that a new outbreak is running at Sheep Ranch. Thursday we were informed that City

Health Officer Weirich reported twenty-seven new cases in Angels Camp.”

The Prospect reported that three county residents had already succumbed to the flu, and that the Red Cross was setting up temporary hospitals in Angels Camp. According to the Nov. 16 issue of the Record, “The Red Cross ladies have opened up the old Central Park hotel as a hospital for influenza cases and will very shortly be ready for patients.”

Just down the road from Angels Camp, Melones was also being hit hard.

“Reports from the mining town of Melones state that there are twenty-nine cases of influenza in that place,” a Prospect article reads. “The saloons are now closed and a strict quarantine is being enforced.” A death from Spanish influenza was reported in Sheep Ranch.

“(Ralph O. Gale) was employed in the Sheep Ranch mine and a few days ago visited the home of his parents at Paloma, who recently lost their home by fire,” an article reads. “While in that town he evidently contracted the disease as there were several cases in that place.... He leaves two small children, besides a widow.”

Several deaths were reported in Tuolumne County, including that of a mother who had lost her daughter to influenza a week earlier.

“This double sorrow is a hard blow to the husband and father whose home has been completely wrecked by the cruel invader,” an article reads.

It was reported that a soldier from Milton had died “from an attack of the influenza” while at Camp Fremont near Palo Alto.

“The young man was an exceptionally bright lad and was well liked by all who became acquainted with him,” an article reads. “He leaves to mourn his death a wife, a father, a sister and brother.”

The Prospect’s Murphys correspondent reported that “no meetings are being held by our local fraternal organizations on account of the influenza.” In addition, the semi-annual meeting of the Calaveras and Alpine Livestock Association was “indefinitely postponed” due to “the prevalence of the Spanish influenza throughout the county.”

A short article highlights some of the questionable medicinal practices that were employed in combating the epidemic.

“An old doctor of European training in practice of over forty years, had never lost a patient with pneumonia: his treatment gave immediate and permanent relief, and was so simple as to be within the reach of all without calling in a physician,” the article reads. “It was as follows: Make a ball of cotton about as large as a small marble, saturate it thoroughly with alcohol, then drop about six drops of chloroform on it, then cover it lightly with dry cotton, hold to the mouth and inhale the fumes, inflate the lungs and it will open and expand every lung cell instantaneously.”

The paper also carried the news that “the great world war” had come to an end.

“The news of the signing of the armistice by the German representatives was received in San Andreas early that morning by telephone,” an article reads. “When the morning papers were received confirming the report the ringing of the fire bell, church bells and school bells were kept up for about an hour. Subscriptions were taken up and giant powder was purchased for saluting. The glad news was received with joy. The youngsters carried on the noise making, well into the night.”

After detailing the celebration of the armistice in Mokelumne Hill, in which the “old town ‘whooped ‘er up,’” and “the streets were thronged with people and the enthusiasm was kept up until after midnight,” a Prospect correspondent reported on the flu situation.

“The public school was opened Monday, but the teachers on learning of the ‘flue’ cases at once closed it down,” the article reads. “Constable Ratto has given notice that he will arrest any one that he finds on the street who is not wearing a mask and Judge Burce is liable to give the offenders the limit. Seriously though, the mask is almost a sure preventative.”

The flu was spreading in Copperopolis as well.

“There is quite an epidemic of Spanish influenza in the Copper City at the present time, tho’ no very severe cases,” an article reads. “Clarence Questo, a young man born and reared in this place met his death from the ‘flu’ on the 2nd of this month at the Naval Hospital in San Francisco and was buried on the 5th from the I.O.O.F. hall at this place.”

Like other towns in the county, Copperopolis held a large celebration when the armistice was signed.

“The town was in an uproar all day yesterday,” the Prospect reported. “The whistles were blowing, bells were (rung) and every youngster in town that could find a tin can was banging away on it, and in the evening the band played, and a dance was given at the hall—Spanish Influenza being at the time forgotten.”

On Nov. 18, an article appeared in the Stockton Daily Evening Record titled “The ‘Flu’ in Angels Camp Keeps Everybody on the Jump.”

“The Red Cross has had to open three different places for influenza patients as there were up to Saturday evening at 8 o’clock 65 cases in Angels, 50 in Melones, and the Red Cross is trying to take care of all,” the article reads. “A state health attache came to Angels on Saturday evening to take charge of the hospitals of which there are three in full swing. The high and grammar school teachers are acting nurses and are commended for their efforts. Dr. Weirich, the city health officer, is a very busy man and is on the go day and night.”

Two days later, an article in the Record provided more details on the situation in Angels.

“Fifteen new cases of ‘flu’ and 35 in hospitals,” an article reads. “The high and grammar school teachers are all to be commended for their service. They are making fine nurses. A trained nurse from the coast is here in charge, and has an apprentice with her and with the teacher staff they are getting along fine.”

Melones reported Monday that the entire town had the ‘flu’ but none in such form as to be

dangerous. Angels saloons have closed voluntarily until the disease is checked. Business in town is greatly depressed.”

The same day, the Record reported that several tourists had been arrested in the county.

“Five tourists were held up Sunday by Sheriff Cosgrave for violating the ‘flu’ mask ordinance,” an article reads. “Justice Walter in dismissing the cases of two, instructed them that the masks should be worn on the face and not in the coat pocket.”

In some parts of the county, the flu situation was much better. A letter to the editor from Mokelumne Hill chafed at the continuing mask ordinance.

“Now that all of our flue patients are normal we can see no reason why the Board of Supervisors cannot rescind the wearing of the masks in this town,” the letter reads. “We never would have had a case in the first place if it had not been brought here from the outside. But when the local physician pronounced that we had cases in the town we immediately took the ‘bull by the horns.’ A telephone was at once sent to the County Health officer at Angels, asking for permission to quarantine the cases. The permission was granted and a strict quarantine was established and will be maintained until there is absolutely no danger.”

On Nov. 18, the public school in Camanche reopened after having been closed for two weeks, and the schools in Murphys and Milton reopened the same day.

But with cases still increasing in Angels Camp, Melones and Copperopolis, the authorities arrested several people for violating the mask ordinance.

“Bob Rafolovich of Angels Camp was sentenced to ten days in the county jail by Judge McClory, Friday morning, for failing to wear a mask as provided by law,” an article reads. “Constable O’Connor brought him

down this afternoon, and he now languishes in duress vile. Sheriff Cosgrave made a whole-sale catch at Copperopolis Thursday when he arrested ten violators at that place.”

Significantly more deaths were reported by the Prospect in Tuolumne County than in Calaveras County during the second wave.

“Disease and death that is running riot through the country has claimed its victims here. Among the more recent to give up his life to the so-called Spanish influenza was Alfred Terzich, a young man born and reared in this city,” a Nov. 23 article reads. “The disease rapidly developed into pneumonia of that peculiar undefinable kind not (responsive) to the best treatment known to medical science. With the great vitality of his vigorous constitution he fought bravely against surrendering his young life, but without avail.”

On Nov. 30, the Prospect reported that the flu situation was rapidly improving in Calaveras County. “The prevailing epidemic of so-called Spanish influenza in this county is pretty well under control,” an article reads. “Mokelumne Hill reports

all its cases out of danger and no new ones. San Andreas is entirely free from the disease. The situation at Melones and Angels Camp is most encouraging and the doctors have the epidemic well in hand. Copperopolis has a few cases. The (worst) place now is Campo Seco where the malady has taken a new hold and there are quite a few cases there. The large cities of the State have suspended the wearing of masks and no new outbreaks are reported.”

In the same issue, a headline reads, “Death Claims Promising Young Man At Copperopolis.”

“The death is one of extreme sadness in that the young married couple had just furnished a new cottage at Copperopolis and had



**Sheriff John Cosgrave, 1914–22. 13th Sheriff of Calaveras County.** Photo courtesy of Calaveras County Historical Society

scarcely moved into the little home about eight days ago when he was stricken with illness," the article reads. "The young husband had the care of two trained nurses and a physician who were constantly in attendance, but notwithstanding all that could be done for him, he passed away during the night."

A soldier's letter brought the news that Calaveras County native Miss Elizabeth Lee had died in France while nursing influenza patients.

"It nearly broke the bunch up," the letter reads. "She was the favorite with the boys in the short time we had known her, and her death was so sudden. She took sick one afternoon, the next morning she died. I ordered the best bouquet I could get in the dinky little town, and the unit sent a wreath along with several others from the boys. Major Bryant in his fine way took charge and secured the best coffin he could. It was only hard polished wood. She was laid away here in France next to the very boys whom she had nursed and for whom she had died."

The Prospect reported that the school had reopened in Mokelumne Hill on Nov. 25 after having been closed for four weeks.

"The flu is now a thing of the past in so far as this town is concerned," an article reads. "The quarantines were raised Monday, and the public school was opened. We had ten cases in the town, but we nipped the epidemic in the bud by a strict quarantine."

Calaveras High School in San Andreas and the public school in Milton reopened on Dec. 2, and school was once again in session in Altaville by Dec. 8. While there had yet to be any influenza cases in Rail Road Flat, the school remained closed through the end of the year.

"Last Friday the trustees decided to keep the school in this district closed until after the holidays," an article reads. "Much uneasiness is felt here on account of the different diseases that are prevalent in the county. There have been no cases of influenza among us yet, and we are taking every precaution to not have any."

On Dec. 5, the Spanish flu claimed another victim, a 33-year-old man with a wife and two small children. "Grover Fischer is dead," an article reads. "Influenza that has been reaping its harvest for the tomb came to our dear young friend and he wrapped the 'drapery of his couch about him and lay down to pleasant dreams.' Grover died at the Angels Red

Cross hospital on Tuesday morning... (He) was a trusted employee of the Utica Mining Company of Angels and was stationed at the Ross Reservoir, one of the stations on the big water ditch."

On Dec. 7, the Prospect carried a report from State Health Officer Edward A. Ingham on the flu situation in Angels Camp.

"The influenza situation in Angels Camp has improved rapidly during the past week and City Health Officer, Weirick, has had no reports of new cases for three days," Ingham wrote. "At a meeting of the City Board of Health, Wednesday night it was decided that in view of the improvement in conditions the bars should be allowed to open."

The Prospect noted that some Angels Camp residents had called for the removal of the hospital from the city as the epidemic waned there.

"In view of the fact that the cost of establishing and maintaining the hospital had been shared by Red Cross members from Copperopolis, Campo Seco and other parts of the county, it would have been decidedly unfair and foreign to the spirit of the Red Cross to have the hospital out of Angels, simply because that city no longer had use for it," an article reads. "If the situation in the county continues to improve it is probable that the hospital will close in about two weeks, or that those cases which may remain may be transferred to the (County) Hospital. The space at the County Hospital is very limited, however, and the recent epidemic has emphasized the need of a good sized (modern) hospital somewhere in the county."

On Dec. 9, the Record reported a series of arrests under the mask ordinance.

"The sheriff of Calaveras, his deputies and the city marshal of Angels, have been conspicuously energetic during the past week, skipping through the county and appearing at different points as suddenly as Banquo's ghost and then and there making arrests," an article reads. "Sheep Ranch fell for some 13 delinquents on the 'flu' mask regulation, while Murphys, Vallecito and all along the line arrests were made and fines imposed upon unsuspecting people. Some of the very first violators of the mask ordinance witnessed in eastern Calaveras were men close in touch with the framing of the drastic measure that today separates man from his money."

On Dec. 11, the Record reported that life was returning to normal in Angels Camp.

“Angels is beginning to creep out again,” an article reads. “The county trustees still have the ‘flu’ masks on the people, but will soon permit them to be discarded. The ‘flu’ surely did up Angels to a standstill. Business was paralyzed.”

While Angels Camp rescinded its mask ordinance on Dec. 13, the second wave of the flu would claim at least one more victim in the area.

“The Indians from Railroad Flat have been scouring the hills here looking for Ike the Indian that had the ‘flu’ and was in the hospital at Angels, but while (delirious) wandered away,” an article reads. “Up to the present no (trace) has been found.”

Over a month later, the man’s body was located in a grove of pine trees east of Los Muertos, “still clothed in the night shirt that he wore when he escaped.”

On Dec. 18, a Prospect correspondent reported that there were still no cases in Mountain Ranch.

“No cases of ‘flu’ but the mask is still a feature,” the correspondent reported. “No delinquents Sheriff.” The second wave had come to an end in Camanche.

“The ‘flu’ has all disappeared from here now,” a Prospect correspondent reported. “We all hope that no more cases will break out. Dr. Geo. F. Pache was here Saturday and ordered the saloons to open up again.”

On Dec. 21, the Prospect carried a letter from a reader in Melones.

“It is well to let the outside world know how we attended to the sick during the recent epidemic here,” the letter reads. “We fitted up two houses for hospitals and kept most all the patients there. Had a doctor from Sonora to stay here and hired a trained nurse from Stockton. All the ladies of the town assisted in one way or another; some helped the nurse, others cooked for the sick and the help. Mrs. Stevenot of Carson Hill, who formerly was a trained nurse, was a faithful worker until she contracted the disease and was compelled to go to her bed. All worked harmoniously and accomplished good results. We are now free from the ‘flu’ and are congratulating ourselves on the efficient work done in such a short time. In all 100 cases of influenza were treated.”

The county’s mask ordinance was rescinded a few days before Christmas after having been in effect for almost two months.

“The Calaveras Mask Law was declared null and void,” an article reads. “The Sheriff’s office was

instructed to inform the public that evening that the (masks) could be taken off.”

On Dec. 24, a headline in the Record read, “‘Flu’ Conquered, Masks Off At Angels Camp.”

“The ‘flu’ is now a thing of the past,” the article reads. “The county lifted the ‘flu’ law last Saturday and people now rejoice at being again free. Christmas trade had been dull as people were afraid to come to town. The weather has been bitterly cold for two weeks past. The movie picture show opened up again a few days ago, and had record houses, people being hungry for entertainment.”

While the worst was over, the third wave of the Spanish flu would hit the county from early January to the end of May, bringing with it more illness and death.

“Is there anything to be gained from the havoc caused by the epidemic?” an editorial in the Feb. 15, 1919 issue of the Prospect reads. “There surely would be if it made us get at the causes behind it. They might teach us how to avoid such a calamity in the future.”

*A version of this article was originally published in the Calaveras Enterprise and has been republished here with the express permission of the Calaveras First Company.*

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## ***July–August–September 2020***

### **New Members:**

Tim Connacher—Riverside  
Eric Costa—Pine Grove  
Marsha Redding—Murphys  
Phil & Michele Poblano—San Andreas  
Barbara Kathan—San Andreas  
Matt Hazen, Sr.—Fremont  
Lifetime Members:  
Jerry Perkins—Mountain Ranch  
John Gibson—Folsom  
Kathy Zancanella—San Andreas  
Catherine Brady-Brown—San Andreas

# Calaveras County Historical Society

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

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The Calaveras County Historical Society is a nonprofit 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; and the historic Red Barn Museum at 891 Mountain Ranch Road, also in San Andreas, which is open Thursday to Sunday, 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM—Spring & Summer Hours. Saturday & Sunday 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM—Winter Hours.

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 museums while in the area. The office is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM, and the telephone number is (209) 754-1058, or contact us at: CCHS@goldrush.com; Red Barn Museum (209) 754-0800.

## July–August–September 2020

### Donations:

In memory of Colette “Coco” Shearer—2 narrow gauge ore cars, 1 narrow gauge tool car, rail tracks, railroad switch sign and a monitor, to be displayed at the Red Barn Museum Mining Display

Patrick Johnson—copy of *The Haight 1967*, written by Patrick Johnson, for our library collection; monetary donation

Patricia Young—Quilt comprised of strips of silk, made by Louisa Mary Peirano in Angels Camp, c. 1800–1900

Pat, Patrick & Alysia McLaughlin—Cigar box doll bed; 2 wooden dolls; wooden boot jack, signed: Big Trees, Mrs. Job Whiteside, 1903; woven basket; Kerosene Can; ice cream maker, hand crank; vintage backpack frame; Quilt, Circle Chain pattern, c. 1900; crucible and base—from Whiteside cabin, Tamarack

Don Cuneo—Photograph, *Lee Hudo, Belle of the Camp, 1970*

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Ramona Phillips (Perira) & Carmela Martell (Perira)—Paper roll holder, 3 ledger books from c. 1920s, 3 receipt books c. 1930s from Perira Store in Campo Seco