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JUDGE J. A. SMITH RETIRES

Members of the Calaveras County Historical Society are very proud of the honors being given our beloved president upon his retirement as Judge of the Superior Court of Calaveras County after forty years of faithful and efficient service to the people of the county. We in the Historical Society have an even greater reason for wishing to show our respect and admiration for Judge Smith at this time. He has served so indispensably as our president during the life of the society. To him more than anyone must be given the credit for organizing the Historical Society and leading it through five years of successful achievement. As a result of his personal research and by encouraging others to record their historical information and to do research, the society has been able to write through the pages of Las Calaveras a fairly good history of Calaveras County.

We join the Bar Association in honoring Judge Smith upon his retirement from his profession, but we wish him many

more years of happy and useful life as an historian. Now that he is free from his judicial duties we hope he will devote much of his time to his historical writing. With his



SUPERIOR JUDGE J. A. SMITH

continued leadership perhaps the society can realize its original objective of producing at least one special historical publication each year.

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(The following was received by the editor of Las Calaveras from Judge Smith in response to a request for a statement as to his plans for enjoying his retirement after serving 40 years as Superior Judge of Calaveras County. It reflects his delightful spirit of optimism and his keen interest in life so well that I am passing it on to the members of the society as it was written.)

"Dear Coke:

"I have your letter asking if I would make a short statement of what I intend to do now that I have retired.

"I was born and reared in Calaveras County and went to the public schools of the county, but received a great deal of my education from a neighbor who taught my brother and me and his boys at night in his home. He was a school teacher named E. M. Price and was the father of Judge

Price who at one time was the Superior Judge of Alpine County. My brother became a civil engineer. I went to summer school at the University of California and studied law

during the summer sessions. I was admitted to the bar in 1909 after having taught school in the county for 40 months. I read law while I was teaching school.

"My brother and I have quite a walnut orchard, and I intend to take an active interest in managing it with him. We also have an apple orchard and some cattle. I intend to grow both vegetables and flowers, also I intend to keep up my historical writing. I think I will have plenty of things to keep me occupied. Probably Idell and I will do some traveling, depending upon her health.

"I have had quite a time getting my private papers packed up in order to turn the office over to Mr. Airola. At present, I am not able to find anything and I will have quite a job going through all the boxes I have stored under the house. I wouldn't want to move very often.

"With all good wishes—

"Sincerely,
J. A. SMITH"

AN EPISODE OF NORTH BRANCH

By J. A. SMITH

The old town of North Branch about two miles west from San Andreas was on the south side of the North Fork of the Calaveras River. It was a group of irregular cabins with a store, butcher shop, and some more pretentious buildings. It stretched from the Neilsen place to the McGuirk Bridge. Not a single building now remains to mark the spot where stood the once lively mining camp where two or three hundred miners dug for gold. A little graveyard across the highway, known as Pioneer Cemetery, and an oak tree that figures in the story still remain.

Among the miners of North Branch was an old man who lived alone in one of the cabins. One of his peculiarities was to carry the gold that he washed out from day to day in a stout canvas sack in the capacious pockets of his bibbed overalls. One day there came to the camp a young Irishman. He was destitute and out of the kindness of his heart the old miner took him to his cabin, fed him, and gave him employment for a few days.

The desire for gold was too much for the young man. As the old miner moved about his cabin, the sack of gold dust would shift its position, bulging out the loosely hanging overalls, and as it was added to daily, it became more and more conspicuous and a still greater temptation.

Suddenly one evening the young man snatched the golden treasurer from the old man's pocket, dashed out of the cabin, crossed the river on the projecting rocks and was quickly lost in the brush on the adjoining hills.

The older man was not fitted for pursuit and looked upon his gold as lost. But one of his friends came to him and offered to go with him in pursuit of the thief. Accordingly, the two men shouldered their rifles and started out for Mokelumne Hill, toward which place it was thought the man had gone. Arriving at Mokelumne Hill at a late hour, they learned that their man had been there earlier and had secured a new suit of clothing, a haircut, and a shave, and had left for Middle Bar on the Mokelumne River.

The pursuers concluded that they would rest a while and then start for Middle Bar, so as to reach that camp about the break of day. This plan was carried out. At the time Middle Bar was comprised of quite a collection of brush

cabins covered with canvas and was a lively mining town. When the men arrived, they started to search the various places. The first one they entered was a gambling tent and there on a table lay their man asleep. He had lost all his gold and worn out was sleeping heavily. He was roused up and started on the march back to North Branch, walking before and the captors walking behind with ready rifles. Arriving at North Branch that night word was sent out that the man would be tried the next day.

When the morrow arrived several hundred miners had gathered. Everything was carried out decently and in order. A sheriff was elected and a jury of twelve miners drawn to render a verdict. The old man gave his testimony as to the theft of the gold and the flight of the prisoner and the story of his capture. The friend corroborated the story of the old miner and the jury retired behind one of the old buildings to decide on the verdict, which was quickly rendered that the man was guilty and should be hanged.

Asked if he had anything to say for himself, the prisoner answered that if he was to be hanged he would like to have the services of a priest.

Accordingly, a messenger was dispatched to San Andreas for the priest located there. When the priest arrived he heard the man's confession and administered the right of the church, after which the gruesome preparations for the execution went on.

The man was taken to the big oak tree that still stands along the side of the road near the Neilsen home, a rope was adjusted to one of the limbs and beneath it a box on which was placed a barrel. On this barrel the young man stood while a noose was placed around his neck. The temporary sheriff directed the proceedings from on horseback. A rope from the horn of his saddle was fastened to the barrel. When all was ready the sheriff spurred his horse and the man was left dangling in the air.

ST. ANDREWS CHURCH

By Mrs. ROSE JOSEPH

(Apologies to Coke Wood)

A Catholic priest, Father John Bobard, in May, 1851, first visited in San Andreas. He left during the summer and resided at Mokelumne Hill but returned in the fall and made plans to build a church. This church was a canvas structure, having a wooden cross over the door. The interior had no seats but there was an altar at one end covered with candlesticks made of wine bottles. The church was named San Andreas and it is presumed the camp took its name from the church. In 1851 Father Bobard established the church mentioned above. This was probably the first Catholic Church in what is now Calaveras County.

In May, 1856, San Andreas was burned, including the Catholic Church and the parish house. A new building, despite the fire, was erected with the aid of Catholics and non-Catholics and in August, 1857, it was dedicated by Archbishop Alemany of San Francisco.

It is significant that the church mentioned above has now been replaced by another Catholic Church on the very site of the aforementioned church which stood for a century.

Probably one hundred years from now your children will be recalling the day the new St. Andrews was dedicated.

THE CLARK DITCH

Mr. Warren V. Clark came to California from Connecticut. He was a railroad engineer, and was the locator of the Sandusky and Ohio Railroad.

He left his Eastern home in 1849, lured by the tales of gold in California and crossed the Isthmus of Panama and arrived at the "Diggings" in April, 1850. He first located in El Dorado County and having brought his surveyor instruments with him, he was soon engaged in locating miners' ditches from the Sacramento River on the north to the Tuolumne River on the south. From his various jobs he had about \$35,000 in gold dust and this was the financial nucleus with which he undertook the building of the Clark Ditch.

The ditch took water from the South Fork of the Mokelumne River near the western end of Blue Mountain and originally ran to Railroad Flat. This section was surveyed in early 1856, construction work was begun in May of that year and in five months the ditch had been completed to Railroad Flat. This first section was 25 miles in length and the water was used to mine the placers of Independence Flat and Railroad Flat.

Mr. Clark conducted large hydraulic operations at Railroad Flat. At one time he had three hydraulics working and using about 1,000 miners' inches of water.

The task of constructing the ditch was difficult. Roads had to be built to transport material and supplies. Food was purchased in Sacramento and Stockton and transported with pack train. Construction began near Railroad Flat and proceeded easterly with camps established at various places along the way.

Many men volunteered to work on the ditch and take their pay out in water. First there were 500 and they finally dwindled down to 50. Those that quit demanded their pay and the gold dust bank was soon exhausted. The ditch was finally completed and water turned in October 1, 1856.

In 1879, the ditch was extended to Mosquito Gulch and its carrying capacity was 2,000 inches.

Cook Bros., who were mining on the Jesus Maria dug a ditch from Mosquito to Rich Gulch. At this place the water was turned into a natural channel and again picked up in Cook's ditch and taken to their gravel mine on the Jesus Maria.

Singularly enough, the Cook Bros. Gravel Mine was a great producer of gold, and the high expectations of the Cook Bros. was not realized after they secured the new supply of water.

The Clark Ditch became embroiled in a controversy with the Mokelumne Hill Ditch. They took water from the same stream. The head of the Clark Ditch was higher up the stream than the head of the Mokelumne Hill Ditch, but the Mokelumne Hill Ditch had prior rights. The Clark Ditch was enjoined from taking water from the stream that the Mokelumne Hill Ditch had the first right to.

Mr. Clark had a scheme to take water to San Francisco and when the City was looking for water rights he spent much time trying to sell the City a water project. He was going to take water from the North Fork of the Mokelumne River to be fed from Blue Lake and many smaller lakes in the mountains and the Clark Ditch was part of the scheme. Clark was going to run the water from the Mokelumne River in an open ditch to some place between Paloma and Toyon. Here he was to erect a great reservoir and pipe the water to San Francisco. On the bank of the ditch he

was going to construct a track for a railroad and haul timber to the vicinity of the reservoir and here to employ huge lumber operations. When San Francisco purchased Spring Valley, Clark's scheme went to pieces.

O'BYRNES FERRY BRIDGE

By J. A. SMITH

In the fall of 1852, Peter O. Byrnes began the construction of a chain cable suspension toll bridge across the Stanislaus River at a point now known as the O'Byrnes Ferry on the main road leading from Stockton to Sonora. The towns of Copperopolis and Milton had not yet come into existence. It was so erected as to be eight feet above water and had a plank flooring. The bridge was completed in the spring of 1853. The high water of 1852-53 did not affect the structure. In November, 1853, the chain on one end of the bridge parted and the bridge fell. There was on the bridge at the time a six-ox team and two men in charge of the team. The ox team was lost in the swirling waters but the two men managed to make shore and were saved.

The parting of the chain was believed to be due to the extra weight on the bridge from the incessant rains of the winter of 1852-53. Subsequently, the bridge was repaired at a price of approximately \$3,000 and again opened to the traveling public. This bridge went down stream in the high waters of 1861-62 when most of the bridges in the county were swept away.

Therefore, a second bridge was placed across the river at the same place. This was a covered cantilever bridge ten feet higher than the former suspension bridge. It was built by a company calling itself the "Union Bridge Company" and the bridge was called "Union Bridge."

Apparently in the early eighties the bridge was in bad condition and in need of repairs. In the Calaveras Citizen, a San Andreas newspaper, in the issue of March 29, 1884, Joe Pardies inserted a notice to the public stating that the "Union Bridge" crossing the Stanislaus River at O'Byrnes Ferry is completely repaired and now open to the traveling public. He further stated that it was the only bridge across the Stanislaus River between Calaveras and Tuolumne counties.

The toll house and several buildings, including a store, were on the Calaveras side of the river. Ruins of some of the buildings are still visible. Tolls for use of the bridge were collected by Joe Pardies, who was the principal stockholder of the company during his life time. His interest later was passed to his nephew, Peter Camou.

The counties of Calaveras and Tuolumne purchased the bridge on December 6, 1902, for the sum of \$4,000 and opened it to the public. The deed from the Union Bridge Company to the counties was signed by Peter Camou as president and F. W. Street as secretary. The office of the company was Sonora, California.

During the life of the bridge one of the supporting arches within the structure had buckled badly. It is said this was caused by a workman tightening the bolts after the summer season instead of loosening them to accommodate for the wet weather.

The name was originally Peter O. Byrnes, and the name O'Byrnes is now the accepted name for the ferry and bridge.

I have never been able to find any record of the old ferry.

OFFICERS OF CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

San Andreas, California

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Las Calaveras is published quarterly by the Calaveras County Historical Society for the benefit of the members. Membership in the society is \$4.00 a year. Non-members may obtain copies of Las Calaveras for \$1.00 a copy. The historical material in this bulletin is not copyrighted and anyone is invited to use it. Mention of the source will be appreciated.

The Calaveras County Historical Society meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at the Courthouse in San Andreas. Dinner meetings are held each quarter at different places in the county.

EDITORIAL

It is with deep regret that we accept the resignation of our treasurer, Mrs. Ella Thompson. However, she and Bill were leaving the county and moving to Modesto where they are going into business and it was necessary. Ella has served loyally and efficiently as treasurer since the society was organized. We are sorry to lose her but we wish her all possible happiness and success in her new home.

Mrs. Violet L. Cuslidge of San Andreas was elected as treasurer to finish out the year.

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The October dinner meeting in the old Armory Hall at Copperopolis was a happy occasion. The ladies of the Community Club had the hall nicely decorated with Halloween colors and the ham dinner was delicious.

Paul Lewis showed his slides of the historic markers in Calaveras County. He included some special views of the O'Byrnes Ferry Bridge and the preparations being made to flood the area. As a result of his survey of the markers in the county, made at his own expense, Paul was able to present a complete report to Dr. Aubrey Neasham, State Historian, on all the markers in the county. Dr. Neasham expressed his appreciation for the report and praised Calaveras County for being one of the leading counties in marking historic places. Only Los Angeles and San Diego counties exceed Calaveras County in the number of markers.

Dr. Neasham encouraged the society to continue its efforts to save the O'Byrnes Ferry Covered Bridge, stating that the agency creating the reservoir was morally responsible for moving the bridge. As a result of this discussion, the society passed a resolution asking the South San Joaquin and Oakdale Irrigation District to make every possible effort to save the bridge.

The second annual Christmas party was held at Blewett's Cafe in San Andreas and was one of the most enjoyable meetings of the year. The beautifully decorated tree the special music, the readings, the jolly Santa Claus, the fellowship, and the refreshments all added up to one of the happiest events in the holiday season.

THE THORN HOME

By MRS. ROSE JOSEPH

To me, who as a neighbor lived next door to and loved and revered Anna and Ben Thorn, this report would not be complete unless I stated some of the details as they are in my Book of Memories.

Ben and Anna Thorn bore two daughters, Edith and Susie. To Edith was born a daughter, Lurline, who used to come up to San Andreas with her mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Soher. My mother would dress me up and I would make a very formal call; in a day or two Lurline (Babe to me) and I would go down in back and make mud pies and build rock houses. I'm sure she couldn't do this in San Francisco.

I recall that when the Sohers arrived and the four or six horse stage drew reign in front of the Thorn home and the steps were placed so the passengers could alight, this was one of those supreme moments in my life. Next day we were making the above mentioned mud pies.

The Thorn home, I am informed, was built in 1857; the bricks were brought from Stockton by mule team. This home is still in remarkably good condition although it was erected nearly one hundred years ago. It has three floors. The upper floor is used entirely as bedrooms, and the middle floor consists of a front and back parlor with sliding doors between. I believe the old table piano that the Thorn girls played upon so nicely is still in the front parlor as is the marble fireplace in the back parlor. I sat in front of it many times with Anna (Mrs. Ben Thorn) when Ben was out looking for desperadoes. Off the back parlor are two bedrooms. A winding staircase extends upward from the front hall to the bedrooms on the upper floor.

I lived for a year in San Francisco with the Soher family and Babe and I had a wonderful time. I always wished I could swim and dive like she did. I shall always cherish her memory as well as that of the other members of the family who have now passed on, and to my Book of Memories has been added another chapter.

My apologies if I have made too much of a family, but really, it takes a family to make a home.

I am told by Dame Rumor that the Thorn house has been sold and I wish my new neighbors much peace and happiness.

GLENCOE SCHOOL HOUSE BURNED

The Calaveras Citizen of July 15, 1881, carried the following news item:

"The school house at Glencoe in the Mosquito Gulch School District was destroyed by fire last Sunday night.

"The building which is a comparatively new one, stands quite a distance from any other building and no fire had been built in it for months. These facts with several suspicious circumstances indicate that the burning was the work of an incendiary."