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Calaveras County Historical Society

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## SAN ANTONIO CAMP

By J. A. SMITH

One building, the old stone store of Frank Cuneo, remains to mark the site of San Antonio Camp, a rip-roaring mining camp located on the south side of San Antonio Creek in Calaveras County about one half mile as the crow flies from Fricot City.

In the early fifties this was one of the principal gold mining camps in Calaveras County and the story of the place is one of excitement, joy, satisfaction, tragedy and disappointment.

At one time all the usual business houses in a mining community were actively engaged in business here and the place had five stores. Later Mr. Cuneo bought out the remaining store business of Frank Monte Verda and Frank Letore and built his own store building where he remained in business for many years.

A jewelry store stood almost directly across the street from the Cuneo store and the large commodious dance hall, where the revelers danced until broad daylight, stood a little further south. Mr. A. Bense conducted a modern bakeshop in the town. The main street had been paved earlier with cobble stones taken from nearby San Antonio Creek.

Originally there was only one road leading to the camp, being on the north side of the creek, and the goods were brought in by ox teams. Later, a better road was constructed to the south. Now a road goes up the creek to the old town.

One-half mile up the creek from the town the great limestone belt crossed the creek bed and at this place gold was taken out in large quantities. The Chase claim was worked for many years and is the best known of the crevice claims.

In addition to mining on San Antonio Creek, the smaller creeks and gulches flowing into San Antonio Creek were worked almost to the crests of the surrounding ridges. Rich Gulch, Victoria Gulch, Buntz Gulch, Nigger Gulch, and Buster's Gulch were the better known of these side gulches or **small creeks**.

Quite a few large nuggets were taken from the vicinity of San Antonio Camp. In Victoria Gulch, a nugget weighing nine pounds was found.

The camp was the trading center of a large mining population. Sunday was a busy day. The miners came to get their supplies for a week and to fraternize with their

friends at the saloons and gambling houses. It is said that the gamblers at San Antonio Camp required very little time to separate a miner from his "poke."

Disastrous fires twice burned the town to the ground. After the last fire, the town was not rebuilt. Portions of some of the stone walls can still be seen.

It is stated that on one occasion Joaquin Murieta went into a store at San Antonio Camp and purchased some powder and told the storekeeper he would like to try it to see if it was good. He left the store with a small amount of powder and in a short time returned, and stated to the storekeeper that it was all right since it had just killed a Chinaman.

At one time several colored people made San Antonio Camp their home. Several of them are buried in a cemetery in the fields of Mr. Cuneo.

Buster's gold is supposed to still be buried in the immediate vicinity of the old town. This old colored man, who trusted no one, brought his gold from Mokelumne Hill and buried it, fearing he would be robbed. It is said to have been a large amount. An Austrian named Ravenna is said to have buried gold a short distance below the camp.

Honorable C. V. Gotschalk, the first Superior Judge of Calaveras County, was an early day resident of San Antonio Camp. Ben K. Thorn, early day sheriff of Calaveras County, and one of the outstanding sheriffs of early California, began his duties as a constable at San Antonio Camp. Charles Vickers was Justice of the Peace for many years at San Antonio.

Pocket miners were successful in the vicinity of the camp. Mr. Charles Cuneo, son of the old merchant, in recent years took from one pocket almost \$10,000 in gold. One piece weighed four pounds.

William Irvine, an old resident of Calaveras County, related the following story that occurred at San Antonio:

Two men were seated at a table in a saloon gambling. A controversy arose. They drew their weapons and two shots were fired. One fellow fell over dead, but the other rushed outside, untied a horse from a hitching rail, mounted the horse and rapidly rode up the road at break-neck speed. Just as he reached the top of the hill, he wheeled the horse around and came racing back to the saloon. Jumping off the horse, he ran into the saloon and got up on a billiard table. He then asked the bystanders to pull off his boots, remarking that he did not want to die with his boots on. He had not realized that he had been wounded until he was well up the road. Mr. Irvine stated that he had his boots off only a short time before he died.

Many murders were committed at San Antonio Camp, and many of the criminal trials held in the early days of Calaveras County came from San Antonio Camp.

Peace and tranquility now reign at the camp, but its romance will continue to live.

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W. F. Forman was killed by W. T. Horton in a dispute over the title to some land at Valley Springs, Friday, May 12, 1854.

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The Farmer's Alliance of Calaveras County is going to give a basket picnic on Saturday next at Jenny Lind.—From the "Stockton Mail," April 20, 1892.

## SAN ANTONIO RIDGE

By J. A. SMITH

That portion of Calaveras County between the San Antonio Creek and O'Neils Creek is commonly referred to as the San Antonio Ridge. It was the scene of much activity in the early fifties. There are few spots in Calaveras County as picturesque.

In an article appearing in the San Andreas "Independent," January 29, 1859, a description of this section of the county is given. The writer states:

"The mines in this district are mostly of the character which require patience and energy in their development, and many years of constant labor to develop them. Railroad Hill, Hope Hill, Tunnel Hill and Chase's Diggings are of this class. The population embraces an unusual proportion of women and children. A neat and well-filled schoolhouse is one of the beneficial results of this happy admixture in the social element of the district. The school is located on the summit of a hill about one mile above Upper Calaveritas. We visited it Monday with one of the trustees, counting 27 children in attendance. Mr. Surm, the teacher, informed us that a number of pupils came two or three miles to school.

"Passing by Railroad Hill, Hope Hill and Bunty's Gulch, which in the palmy days of Calaveras politics once returned a 150 majority for a certain candidate when there were only two voters living in the precinct, we arrived at the old sawmill of the San Antonio Ditch Company, eight miles above Calaveritas.

"This was, in times past, the only source from whence the miners on the ridge drew their supply of lumber. It was then the theater of pleasant and robust life, but now it is deserted.

"On Monday we visited San Antonio. The old camp looks deserted. The bed of the river, opposite, above and below the town has been worked annually for eight years. Still it pays wages and will for the most part be worked again this spring. A new wagon road is in the course of construction down to town from the ridge on the north. The place contains two stores and some 20 to 30 dwelling houses. Mr. Cazenova is the very gentlemanly proprietor of one of these stores.

"The celebrated 'Chase Claim' is up the river a mile from San Antonio. It is located on a bar and runs into the point of a hill, crossing the mouth of a small ravine, obliquely following a lode of hard crystallized limestone. The outside of the bar was shallow and has long since been worked out, but as the operations were extended toward the point of the hill, the limestone pitched off at an abrupt angle, rendering the diggings very deep and more expensive to work. However, the dirt becomes richer with depth. Some of the gold is coarse and one nugget weighed 19 ounces.

"The proprietors have been working the ground for five years and will furnish employment for the same force for many years to come."

U. S. Senator Broderick addressed the people of Calaveras County at the Metropolitan Hall, San Andreas, on August 6, 1859. Shortly after this he was killed in a duel with Judge David Terry near San Francisco.

## LOST CITY OF CALAVERAS COUNTY

By JAMES J. BROWN

Sacramento Bee, May 8, 1960

The so-called Lost City of Calaveras County is a legendary mystery no more.

Its origins have been uncovered by an ambitious and strongly documented research job by a former Sacramento State College student, Donald E. Barrows of Stockton, San Joaquin County.

Barrows' work exploded a lot of the old fables surrounding the group of native stone buildings in Salt Spring Valley, Calaveras County. For years stories have piled up, in layer upon layer of romantic legend, concerning the ruins.

Some have said it originally was an Indian village. Others, that early Spanish or Mexican settlers built it. Still others have speculated a group of French soldiers lived there, gold seekers, perhaps.

One source ventured that the famous bandit, Joaquin Murietta, used it as a hideout between raids.

### Merely Stories

All the stories appear, now, to have been just that—stories.

The reality, as unfortunately is so often the case, is more prosaic.

Barrows heard about the legends while studying history at Sacramento State College under Professor Joseph A. McGowan. Last spring he set out on an exhaustive, painstaking search for old records, oldtimers who lived in the area decades ago, and bits of lore scattered throughout Calaveras and surrounding countryside.

His research took him over 1,200 miles of Calaveras roads and through ancient, musty official records and newspaper files by the dozen.

McGowan, who read a story about the Lost City in the April 3rd Sunday Leisure section of The Bee, made available the fruits of Barrows' labors—a 41-page paper on the subject, complete with pictures, verbatim interviews and other material.

### Convincing Proof

Barrows' work offers convincing proof that Lost City was the work of an early settler, Eugene Barbe, who bought the land on which it is situated in May, 1877, according to United States Government records. Barbe was a French settler, naturalized in 1873 in Tuolumne County.

Barrows determined that the stone buildings and mine shafts at the site came into existence after 1877, and undoubtedly were built by Barbe and another man, Marion Eubank, who purchased adjoining land in 1878, according to government records. What became of Eubank is not in the records unearthed by Barrows.

Barbe, Barrows established, was a vegetable peddler who took his produce to nearby towns every week. He was thrown under his wagon wheels and killed when his horse bolted June 22, 1895. After that, the so-called Lost City was mainly deserted. It now is part of the Red House Ranch of William Ofenheim, whose permission is necessary to enter the area.

Barrows did find a possible basis for the Murietta aspect of the stories. One oldtimer of the area said his grandfather, who settled there in the 1850's, told him Murietta had lived there and placer mined the creek. But that evi-

dently was before the time of the Lost City's existence.

But the most authentic background on the place seems to be that supplied by another oldtimer, William B. Gann, who settled with his family in the Salt Spring Valley in 1874.

"According to Mr. Gann," Barrows writes, "no city with stores, Pony Express service or other such facilities ever existed. The slate road, terraces, fruit trees, vines, fences and most of the buildings . . . were the result of one man, Barbe, who raised and sold fruits and vegetables throughout the area.

"Barbe also had a few sheep, cattle and fowl, making the construction of numerous buildings as well as fences around the garden a necessity. Many times Mr. Gann, who has been a rancher all his life, visited the old Frenchman, and he remembers that in his early youth there were only two buildings standing (around 1880-85).

"Barbe, who was a bachelor with no known relatives, occupied the territory for about 15 years or more, as Mr. Gann recalls, and was continuously building and improving the land. . . . Therefore, being a witness (to the area's settlement), Mr. Gann believes that the story of a Lost City has come about by observations based on physical evidence at the scene rather than on factual data . . ."

### JOHN MURPHY

Taken from "History of San Jose," Hall, 1871  
pp. 192-193

"The remarkable fortune of a person in mining, now a resident of San Jose, was so much like the Arabian Night's tales, that I cannot refrain from detailing it. Had he kept his fortune, he would, by its increase, have been one of the wealthiest men of the nation. But his bump of generosity is too great; he was too benevolent, and the fortune came too easy to be appreciated. I refer to Mr. John M. Murphy. He left San Jose in April, 1848, and went to Weber Creek, in Placer County. He employed a few Indians who belonged to the Mission and they induced many of the wild ones to accompany them, until Mr. Murphy had, at one time, nearly one hundred and fifty of them working for him. His influence with them was as productive of gold as the exclamation of "Open Sesame" by Ali Baba, at the cavern door of the forty thieves. After working a few weeks at the first location, they moved to what was called Dry Diggins where Placerville is situated. A part of the Indians were from Stanislaus County. About September, Mr. Murphy sent the Indians from that section back to their old grounds to seek gold. They went, and shortly returned, saying that they had found plenty of it. Murphy then moved to that new place, and there remained until about December, 1849. He had buried nearly two millions of dollars worth of gold. But at that time, it was sold cheaply. Coin was scarce, and most of the people, for a long while, did not know its real value. It was customary to sell the gold at four dollars per ounce, which was intrinsically worth over sixteen. It was not unusual for Mr. Murphy to take in at his store, twenty-five pounds of gold per day. When he first went to Weber Creek, but two other white men were there. His brother, Daniel, and one Dr. Isabell were his partners; although it was then not known, except between the three. No man ever asked Murphy in those days for money, without obtaining it.

## JESUS MARIA

By J. A. SMITH

Many of the early day mining communities of Calaveras County have not survived the decline in mining and the years of change in business and transportation.

Where wealth, activity, business, poverty and romance once held sway, we now find the ghost towns of California. The old mining town of Jesus Maria, located on a tributary of Jesus Maria Creek, is about five miles southeast of Mokelumne Hill. It is not on one of the main traveled roads today, but in its heyday it was on the main road from Mokelumne Hill to Whiskey Slide, Mt. Ranch and Cave City. The locale of Bret Harte's "Poverty Flat" is a short distance southeast of the town.

Little, indeed, remains today to indicate the feverish search for gold in the community. Forgotten is the roar of the giant streams as they washed away the earth. Only the piles of tailings thrown up by modern dredgers that have again worked over the diggings of the miners remain as evidence of the busy camp. Gone is the old vegetable gardener, Jose Maria, for whom the place was named.

Gone are the miners and prospectors. Gone are the cabins of the miners and the business houses, such as the two-story hotel. Gone is the justice court where justice was dispensed by Judge Luke Lincoln and later by A. C. Lewis. Gone is David Phillips, the constable. Gone are the blacksmith shops of Craig and Godaux, the livery stable of Christopher C. Hughes, the dairy of Beffa and Dota, the stores of Griffin and Company and Gayon, and the sawmill which was erected by Lebef to cut the timber from the surrounding hills. No longer do the dance halls echo to the gay laughter of the dancing caballeros and senioritas who danced to the music of the violin and guitar in the Tivoli and Valpariso. No longer is there the large Mexican and Spanish population that made this a favorite visiting place for Joaquin Murieta. Gone is the school which was first established in 1858 and the families who made the town. Only a small adobe building, unoccupied, which was Gayon's store, and two small plots of ground, marking the last resting place of those who passed on, remains to show the place where once a lively community existed.

Yet there is a charm about the place that has never been lost. Nestling among the high hills with its green well-kept fields along the water courses and with its sleek cattle in the meadows, Jesus Maria stands rich in its history and romance, an excellent example of one of California's ghost towns.—(Acknowledgement is hereby made to Mrs. C. J. Griffin of Jesus Maria for her information for this article.)

A. P. Dudley, an outstanding attorney of Calaveras County since its organization, left Mokelumne Hill in the latter part of 1858 to establish himself in his profession in San Francisco.

The Big Tree Bulletin, a newspaper printed and published at the Big Trees, Calaveras County, issued its first paper in May, 1858. Mr. J. Heckendorn, formerly of the Columbia Clipper, was editor and publisher.



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San Andreas, California

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Editor of Las Calaveras ..... Coke Wood, Murphys

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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

The Annual Meeting of the Conference of California Historical Societies which met at Bakersfield on June 23-25 was another successful and stimulating meeting. Mrs. Zumwalt of Mokelumne Hill was the official delegate of the Calaveras society to the Conference and she will report on the meeting. It was partly through the efforts of Mrs. Zumwalt that the next Annual Meeting will be held at Columbia next June. She cooperated with Mrs. Tillie Sheatsly, president of the Tuolumne Historical Society, by assuring the Conference that the Calaveras society would cooperate with the entertainment and arrangements if the Conference would vote to come to Columbia for its next meeting. As there was strong sentiment to take the Annual Meeting to Berkeley next year, these ladies deserve a good deal of praise in persuading the Conference to come back to the state park where it originated in 1953. The date for the meeting will be June 22-24. This location of the Annual Meeting so close to our home will give many of our members a chance to attend these very worthwhile meetings that they have been forced to miss in past years because of the distance to travel.

The new president of the Conference will be L. Burr Belden from the San Bernardino County Historical Society and a columnist for the San Bernardino "Sun." Dr. Clarence McIntosh from the Butte County Historical Society and professor of history at Chico State College will be vice-president, and Miss Ivy Loeber of the Napa County Historical Society was re-elected treasurer. Your editor and second vice-president was re-elected executive secretary for the seventh time.

One of the most interesting events on the program was the panel discussion put on by delegates from the Napa County Junior Historical Society. The presentation of the problems facing an historical society was very ca-

pably presented by youngsters ranging in age from eleven to thirteen years. This report by these youngsters so well trained by Miss Loeber dramatized to the Conference the possibilities of interesting our students in local history.

Our Calaveras County essay contest on local history was certainly an outstanding success this year, and let's hope it will be even better next year. From this contest our society could have the nucleus for organizing a junior historical society that would achieve one of our objectives, education about our local heritage, more effectively than anything we could do. Perhaps this is a matter that Mrs. Hattie Hertzig and her essay committee could consider?

Another emotional highlight of the Annual Meeting was presence of Dr. Rockwell D. Hunt, President Emeritus of the Conference, for his traditional Closing Remarks, which he missed last year because of his serious illness. When, in a firm and steady voice in spite of his 92 years, he urged the delegates to hold high the torch he was passing into their hands and continue their efforts to preserve our wonderful heritage, he was given a tremendous standing ovation.

There were 159 delegates in attendance at the annual banquet, representing over thirty-five local historical societies. The Conference has 78 paid-up active historical groups as members. Any individual may become an associate member of the Conference for \$5.00 a year and receive all publications. This includes the newly-organized "California Historian."

## CARSON HILL GOLD

—"The Days of Gold in Historic Calaveras County," by J. A. Smith (Calaveras Californian, January 29, 1959).

In 1851, says the "Angels Camp Record," a pocket of gold was discovered on the summit of Carson Hill in what is now known as the Morgan Mine. It is said that nearly \$3,000,000 was taken from an excavation that was only 20 feet square and not over 30 feet deep. The formation in which the gold occurred was a magnesium rock, talc schist, heavily iron-stained by oxidation of pyrite in part, mostly of iron-bearing bi-silicates. The gold was found accumulated in bars and shreds about a larger central mass like a huge golden octopus.

The miners worked under armed guards. When blasting, the powder was charged into drill holes and the rock then covered with raw hides and timbers to prevent the rock and gold from flying.

When the blast had gone off the men went into the hole and picked loose as much of the metal that they could get.

The long stringers were twisted and pried with bars and beaten with hammers to loosen them. Often it was necessary to cut this gold with chisels, according to the statements of the men who worked there.

The Carson Hill pocket was undoubtedly the largest ever found in the world, allowing all reasonable latitude for exaggeration, a factor for safety usually necessary when considering these tales of ancient miners.—Calaveras Chronicle, Nov. 9, 1907.

In the fall of 1859, the brick schoolhouse at Altaville, Calaveras County, was constructed. The size is 25 by 18 feet.