



## A FAIR HAired BOY FROM COPPEROPOLIS THE STORY OF EMIL HENDSCH

*by David A. Hensch with Bonnie Miller*

Up and down the Mother Lode in California there are historic markers for history buffs and genealogy enthusiasts to view. Copperopolis represents a major marker and a mystery for me. Little did I know about the township until I heard stories from my Bakersfield relatives in 1947. Since then, I have made a quest of searching for clues illuminating my ancestors' lives.

Copperopolis attracted my great-grandfather Charles, when he opened a tailoring shop in 1861 (see *Las Calaveras*, January 2000). His family followed, taking up residence in 1864. The family lived in two locations in Copper, on Main St. and/or Antelope St. As far as I know, until the death of my great-uncle Goey in 1946, there was a continual presence of Henschs in Copperopolis.

One family story of high interest to me highlights my great-uncle Emil Henry Hensch, first born of Charles and Augusta Hensch in 1853. Charles had immigrated to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1848 from the Solingen area of Prussia. Augusta was born in the West Indies to German speaking

parents in 1832. Charles and she were married in 1850. The new Hensch family at first seemed intent upon settling down in Cincinnati, but a clarion call, perhaps one of gold or free land, beckoned them to relocate to California.

In the springtime of 1856, Charles and young Emil traveled overland by way of the California Trail. Meanwhile mother Augusta used the Panama route to arrive in California during the fall bringing their new baby Matilda. They began their California life in Springfield, near Shaws Flat in Tuolumne County. They lived briefly near Knight's Ferry where their second son William was born. By the end of the decade of the 1850s the family was primarily settled between Copper and Vallecito, and the Copper community became the major influence in young Emil's life.

When Emil grew up in the Mother Lode, he developed the talents and skills for mining. Instead of being attracted to the high life of the San Francisco area as an adult, he followed his own drummer across the Sierras and down the east side to the Chuckawalla Mountains to

the Colorado Desert. Gold and precious metals were his focus. For a while his zenith ascended in reputation and in success, struggling in a volatile U.S. mining industry, from 1880 to 1895.

His story of growing up in Copper follows.

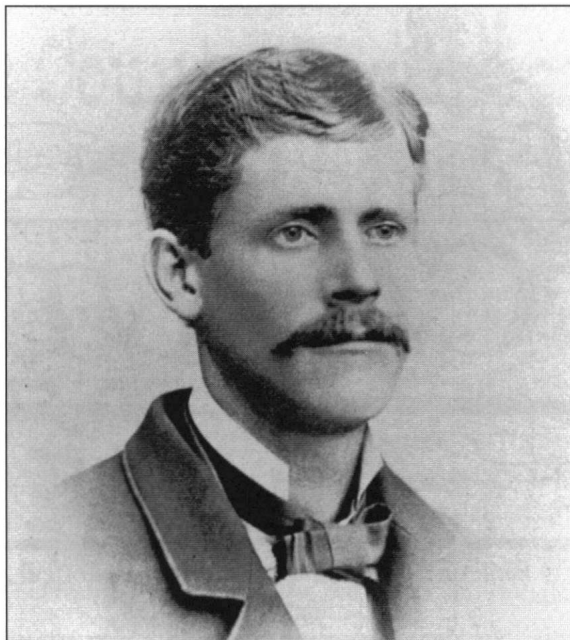
### ***The Young Pioneer***

Emigrating from the east, Emil Henry Hensch was more than a product of Copperopolis. Unlike his siblings who were born in Copperopolis or in the surrounding communities, Emil's first memories were generated in Cincinnati, Ohio. It was a vibrant center and heartland of the U.S. in the 1850s. Trade, commerce, culture and affluence marked Cincinnati's urban lifestyle. The significant social subgroup was German speaking, 50,000 strong. Emil, the infant, was nurtured in an enriched, upwardly mobile, urban environment. Emil, the toddler, was ripped away from these plush conditions to join his father on a trans-continental trip by wagon to California. His experience was fraught with outdoor adventure and excitement living on the trail and later in a copper mining town.

The collective impact of an emigrant's experience on Emil would have enormous consequences for his future life. Independent to a fault, overly aggressive in relationships, defensive when challenged, and practical in problem solving skills, he adapted to his new California surroundings with skills and social traits far different from his siblings.

Copperopolis burst with life and industry after 1860. The Civil War's demand for the copper metal fueled the economic engine of the community.

After 1861, the family resided in nearby Vallecito and Charles commuted to Copper. He shared a rental with a partner on Main Street, a combination barber and tailor shop. While the family



**Emil Henry Hensch**

was living in Vallecito, two more boys Goey and Charles were born. In 1864, the Hensch family relocated back to Copper from Vallecito, as the center of family life in the 1860s was the Hensch tailoring services. A baby girl Caroline joined the family in 1865. Sadly, she only lived three short years and was buried in the Copper Cemetery. Shortly thereafter the family was expanded again when two more boys joined them, Henry in 1869 and Justus in 1872.

At the impressionable age of nine Emil was sizing up future opportunities and adjustments living in the midst of a booming mining culture. One can imagine the excitement of being surrounded with the sights, sounds, and smells of Copper in its heyday: a constant surge of people coming and going through the town on stage coaches while the local citizens conducted their business along Main Street creating a purposeful buzz. The tailor shop attracted clients with exciting stories and with news of the day. Frequent attention was given to ceremonial military events employing members of the National Guard and the pomp and fuss of military protocol. Smoke belching from chimneys, whistles blasting, donkey engines grinding. The clatter of horses and wagons all added to Emil's informal sensory education—the stuff to fuel the imagination of a pre-adolescent boy.

Facing new realities after the Civil War ended, Emil learned to deal with economic hardships and social limitations. He learned to act as a buffer between his immigrant parents and non-immigrants, moderating potential conflicts. Copper's disastrous fire in 1867 leveled the Hensch store leaving the family nearly destitute. His father was burdened with finding new employment, as his tailoring services were no longer needed by a dwindling population in

Copperopolis—ranging from Boom Town (8,000) to Ghost Town (200). Equally tied down was Emil's mother. She was coping with seven children, three below the age of three.

Emil was stuck at home, but increasingly he felt a need to range far and wide, searching for meaningful engagement and excitement. This conflict in his desires caused him tension for he was subordinated by duty to his family. Other younger siblings superseded his need for parental attention. But, with freedom of mobility and of temperament, he compensated by developing extraordinary social networking skills with his peers and elders that far exceeded the myopic world of his family.

Calamity struck in 1871. Emil suddenly became head of the Hensch family when his father died from an untimely accident. Charles had pricked himself with a contaminated sewing needle which caused blood poisoning. Only seventeen, Emil inherited the responsibilities of maintaining a homestead, of providing his mother economic security, and of supervision for six siblings, ages one to fourteen. As the new family manager he faced the daunting and unexpected task of filling his father's shoes during a time of national depression.

At the age of 18, Emil was something to look at. He was 6 feet 4 inches in height, about 200 pounds, very muscular, blondish hair. Gregarious to a fault, he intimidated others with a sense of power and self-determination. His first step was to abandon his father's trade as a tailor and took up work at local mines instead. Working in various mine sites, he observed current methods of solving both the physical and mechanical problems and management issues related to mining. He



Ella McGrann Hensch

learned to make do with used mining equipment and embraced novel new technologies and a wide assortment of materials.

His first test of adulthood was a giant one. Initially his mining lessons were gleaned from the experience of working for other miners. Throughout the 1870s in Calaveras County gold strikes had occurred, but across the U.S. the hard and precious metals economies were in a depression cycle. It was a risky time to establish a mining career. Furthermore, in California a depopulation occurred due to gold

and silver strikes in other regions like Oregon, Montana and British Columbia which drew away the California population.

It is clear that Emil followed a pattern of work that cut across the grain of the times. His peers were flocking to urban centers of California, especially San Francisco, or valley farming areas, or to the railroads for work. Few were pursuing hard-rock mining which carried disrespect relative to past abusive individual and corporate mining practices. To that end, he chose not to work for the local corporate mining groups such as in the Felix District which were active at the time.

Social attitudes toward mining were changing. The flavor of social bias toward degrading the miners and the mining industry is caught in the writings of Rodman W. Paul, *California Gold, the Beginning of Mining in the Far West*. In chapter xv, his message supports this notion. He quotes from the *Mokelumne Hill Weekly Calaveras Chronicle*, "the only occupation in which men appear to engage without the least preparation and foresight, is mining." The article, written in 1868, diminishes the hyperbole of the 1850's miners' image about being "a free miner." Another reference

to miner attitudes used the term "manic" to describe their mind set.

### ***Hensch Mining Efforts***

By 1876, Emil was ready to test out his skill and knowledge on the Mountain Queen

Mine of the Ophir Mining District, south of Copper. He approached this endeavor as a family business. He engaged his brother Bill, at the time 18 years old, as his right hand man, and their younger brother Goey, age 14, as an apprentice. Meanwhile, a series of gold strikes down the Sierras lured them southward. Thereafter the Hensch homestead in Copper, a legal entity in 1969, became a place of rest and of refuge for the young miners during slack times.

After 1880, Emil set his path towards becoming a high profile businessman. First, he welded together the physical and occupational assets of his brothers William, Goey and Charles Junior into an itinerant family company. They proceeded to leave Copperopolis for long periods of time to pursue mining activities in Riverside, San Bernardino and San Diego

Counties. Along the way, Emil forged relationships with businessmen in Bakersfield, a product of his marriage to Ella Coffman McGrann in 1885. Her older sisters were married to influential Bakersfield men. These men bankrolled Emil's mining activities and set him up as their man in the field heading a new company, the Granite Group.

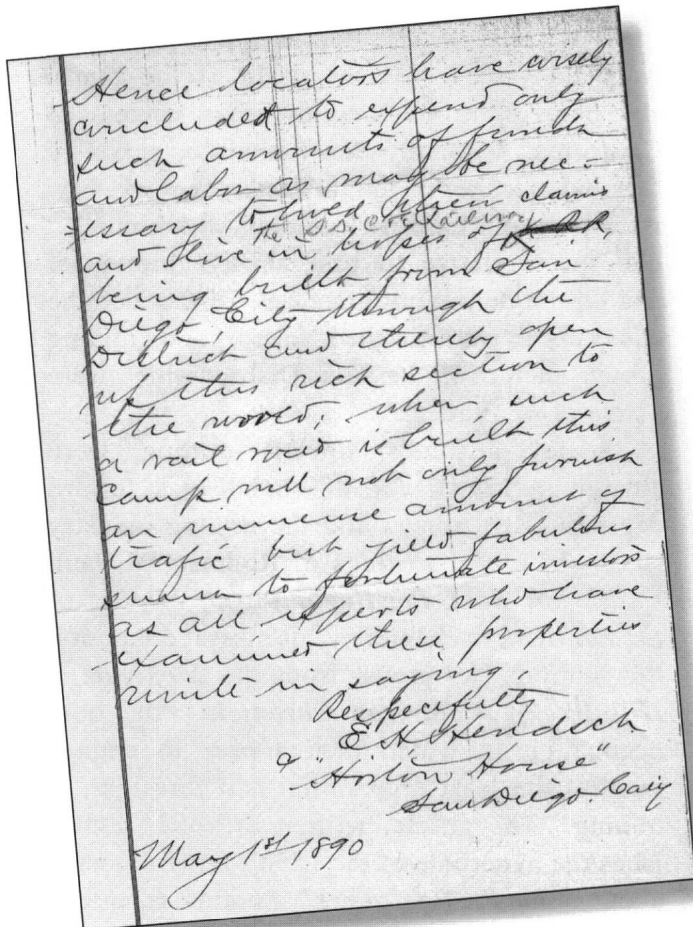
During this decade, sister Matilda married George J. Thompson in Copperopolis. She doubled her role as care giver to her immediate family by taking in their aging mother Augusta. It also fell upon Matilda to provide boarding services for her traveling brothers whenever they were back in Copper. This arrangement freed Emil to travel south in the Colorado Desert, in Riverside and in San Diego. However, his mining influence was also felt as far north as Spokane, Washington, where he maintained a business office and dabbled in mines located in Montana and Vancouver B.C. In all he maintained offices in Spokane, San Diego and San Francisco. His business activities included assaying, metallurgy, mine sales and brokering mining equipment (See Mining Claims listing).

Emil was 42 years old in 1895, in the prime of his life. He seemed to have many things going right, but there was a fly in the ointment. For those few persons who challenged his defensive side, he could become belligerent and aggressive. Emil was unafraid of others. Previous Calaveras County arrest warrants testify to this quirk: for instance one arrest was for the assault and battery of a Copper businessman, while another arrest was for a politically charged brawl in Angels Camp.

In another dramatic dispute, he had mining business with a miner named Jerry Gardiner during the early 1890s. Jerry was an independent prospector who contracted for work in the Colorado Desert area. He was a Civil War veteran and a drifter of sorts. During 1894, Jerry and

Emil had a falling out. Jerry had filed mining claims for himself that Emil contested.

Meanwhile, in the autumn, 1894, J.W. Crawford and Felix Lohrer were partners with Emil in discovering the Granite Mine (south of Desert Center off present-day Highway 10).



Hence locators have widely concluded to expend only such amounts of funds and labor as may be necessary to hold open claims and live in hopes of a strike being built from San Diego City through the District and thereby open up this rich section to the world; when such a rail road is built this camp will not only furnish an immense amount of traffic but will furnish means to fortunate investors as all experts who have examined these properties write in saying,

Respectfully  
E. Hensch  
9 "Horton House"  
San Diego, Calif

May 1<sup>st</sup> 1890



Their lead came from a couple of miners, Adams and Bailey. They were returning to Riverside from the Chuckawallas, and met Emil's buddies on the desert. Adams told Crawford and Lohrer about a site in the southwest Chuckawallas which seemed promising, but it turned out to be disappointing. Emil's friends checked the mining site out, and concluded after a brief analysis that the mine was workable. They requested Emil come and give his professional assessment. Emil's assessment was also positive.

Proper papers were recorded in the Riverside County Recorder's Office by Emil in April, 1894. With excitable energy the Granite Group rolled up their sleeves and began the hard work of developing the mine site. Unfortunately, for the original discoverers, their claim papers were filed months later after the mine revealed its treasures, (\$150,000 was one public estimate).

Adams and Bailey were indignant over their misfortune. A civil suit was lodged in the

Riverside County Superior court in February, 1895. Their allegation asserted Emil was guilty of claim jumping. Jerry Gardiner was associated with the contesting miners, acting like a spy in Emil's midst. Once he had pulled a gun on a fellow miner, Felix Roher at the Granite Mine in late 1894. Fortunately Bill Hendsch had stepped in and prevented misfortune for Felix. Then he was caught red-handed in the mine collecting material evidence for Adams and Bailey.

Emil had no choice but to dismiss Jerry, and six months of hard feelings intensified between the two. Rumors from various bars and watering holes in the area warned that Jerry was out gunning for Emil. Eventually, the situation came to a head.

### ***Emil's Fall***

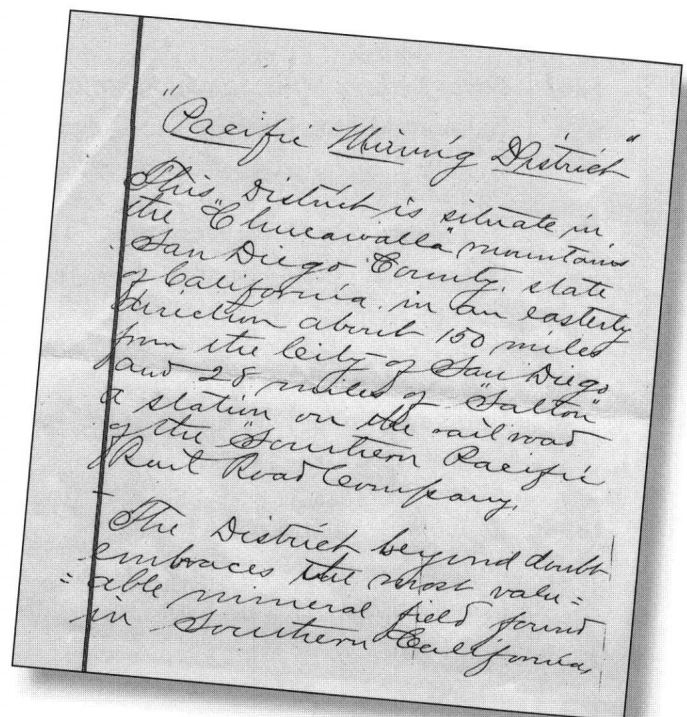
On July 16, 1895, Emil and several of his group rode westward from the Granite Mine to Dos Palms Springs. They intended to catch a train to Riverside to hear the judge's verdict. But, while watering their horses, up rode Jerry. A hostile exchange occurred between the two adversaries. Emil, unarmed, tried to make light of the angry remarks. Jerry was brandishing a hand gun. When Emil turned to climb on his horse to leave, Jerry pulled the trigger. One shot tore through

Emil's armpit and heart, lodging on the opposite side of his chest. He died in seconds. Jerry escaped into the nearby desert. The Hendsch party was left to clean up the death scene and telegraph the county sheriff for assistance.

Surprisingly, society was not on their side. An evolution of perceptual change had taken place in the minds of civic Californians. In 1884 there had been a legal ruling supporting Marysville agriculturalists over Yuba County hydraulic miners. Absolutely, the political clout and social status of miners had reversed. Economic developments in agriculture, railroads, petroleum and water replaced a dwindling, dysfunctional industry. Miners were swallowed up in the process. By the 1890s, miners were considered uncouth and very low brow.

A featured front page article about a recent incident between miners plays on the current stereotype of miners. On the fourth of July, 1895, just days before Emil's death, the ***Riverside Enterprise*** newspaper opened a feature spread by saying:

"The mines of Riverside County, and particularly those located in the eastern section are attracting capitalists. Almost every day new claims are being located, and the amount of time, labor and money that is being sunk into them is now bringing



returns; first in the yields of the mines themselves, and secondly, by the inquiries that are being made by capitalists always on the look for predictable investments.

Naturally the difficulties incident to mining elsewhere are apparent in this county. While some of these are inseparable to the industry, there are others that severely handicap mining men and are the main causes, perhaps, for mining and swindling as being in the minds of people as synonymous terms.”

The article continues to lay out the conflicting circumstances between my great-uncle Emil Hendsch and the two men contesting his claims to the Granite Mine. The matter was brought to the local California Superior Court, and in weeks to come, periodic updates by the

*Enterprise* were printed. Then, on July 16th, 1895, a shocking article revealed the details of my great-uncle’s murder.

In my retrospect more than a century later, as the great-nephew of the murdered man, I am struck by this leading article and its transition to the murder. The reporter depicted miners as a social grouping marked by dangerous risk-taking and social misgivings. A certain odor of contempt is smelled among the printed words. Even in Copperopolis, when the Hendsch boys returned to Copper from six months of labor, trouble was expected. Social perceptions had changed. Where once miners were heralded as the highest form of citizen, now they were viewed as undesirables.

After the murder, the opinion was that Emil had become a high-minded leader of the mining capitalist. The reporter made a clear distinc-

## LIST OF HENDSCH FAMILY MINING CLAIMS

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| <p><b>1876</b> <i>Mountain Queen Mine</i>, Location Notice Ophir Mining District, Calaveras County, CA., April 19, 1876.</p> | <p><b>1890</b> <i>Hematite Iron Mine</i>, Location Notice, Mt. Moreno Mining District, San Diego County, CA., Nov. 8, 1890. A joint discovery with C.A. Hendsch.</p> |
| <p><b>1887</b> <i>Rising Sun Mine</i>, Location Notice, Belmont Mining District, San Diego County, CA., Jan. 1, 1887.</p>    | <p><b>1890</b> <i>Good Enough Mine</i>, Location Notice, Mt. Moreno Mining District, San Diego County CA., Nov. 8, 1890. A joint discovery with W.F. Hendsch.</p>    |
| <p><b>1887</b> <i>Great Western Mine</i>, Location Notice, Belmont Mining District, San Diego County, CA. Jan 1, 1887</p>    | <p><b>1891</b> <i>Ella Tin Mine</i>, Location Notice, Pine Valley Mining District, San Diego County, CA., Dec. 8, 1891</p>   |
| <p><b>1888</b> <i>Red Rock Lode Mine</i>, Location Notice, San Diego County, CA., June 6, 1888.</p>                          | <p><b>1891</b> <i>Emil Tin Mine</i>, Location Notice, Pine Valley Mining District, San Diego County, CA., Dec. 8, 1891.</p>  |
| <p><b>1888</b> <i>Pay Day Mine</i>, Location Notice, Belmont Mining District, San Diego County, CA., Jan. 1887.</p>          | <p><b>1891</b> <i>Mammoth Mine</i>, Location Notice, Pecacho Mining District, San Diego County, CA., June 18, 1891.</p>  |
| <p><b>1890</b> <i>Republic Mine</i>, Location Notice, unknown mining district, San Diego County, CA., Oct. 11, 1890.</p>     | <p><b>1894</b> <i>Granite Mine</i>, Location Notice, Pacific Mining District, Riverside County, CA. April 30, 1894.</p>  |

tion between Emil and Jerry Gardiner, the shooter—one evil and the other good. Reading the story, I sensed a dichotomy between classes of miners: Emil representing the capitalist/exploiter class and Jerry, the drifting free miner—a social pariah.

### *Emil's Legacy*

On July 22, 1895, Emil was buried in the Pioneer section by the Knights of Pythias in the Riverside Evergreen Cemetery. His family was left with emotional devastation and physical loss.

Eventually the law caught up with Jerry. He surrendered to a deputy sheriff securing his safety from Hendsch vengeance, and he was jailed in Riverside. On July 25th he was found dead in his jail cell, an empty bottle of hair tonic with lead found underneath his cot.

After returning from the desert, he complained about pains in his stomach. Apparently his discomfort came from drinking tainted desert water. Ironically, the county coroner upon examining Jerry reported he died of natural causes.

Abruptly and completely Emil was taken away from his loved ones, leaving a huge and depressing void. Ella, his wife, took over operations of his mining assets, where she earned the nickname the “Queen of the Chuckawallas”. Two

years after Emil's death the courts made a final ruling on the Adams and Bailey appeals regarding their allegation that Emil had jumped their claim. On April 9, 1897, a California Supreme Court decision allowed Ella Hendsch and her partners to own the Granite Mine free and clear.

In 1897 Ella sold the rights to a different mining interest called the Red Cloud Mine to another mining group. Later, she was a victim of embezzlement and was swindled by a newly hired lawyer and an accountant, bringing a sad end to a painful struggle.

Eventually Ella and the Hendsch boys separated to create their own livelihoods. She and her two sons Laurence and Harold relocated to Los Angeles where she in time remarried. Ella, Queen of the Chuckawallas, continued a life of many interesting twists and turns, but that is another story.

William and Goey returned to Copperopolis, joining younger brothers Henry and Tex to pick up the loose ends of their lives. For a time they shared in the management of the Big Tree Hotel in Murphys. Later in life, William and Goey became esteemed and honored lawmen in Calaveras County. Brother Charles learned blacksmithing, married and drifted to Bakersfield. Subsequently, the three Hendsch brothers, Bill, Goey and Charles hooked on fifteen years of mining thus far, continued to prospect and develop new mines until the 1930s. Emil's legacy—Once a miner, always a miner!

## **DAVID A. HENDSCH**

David Hendsch is a native Californian. He resides in Oakland with his wife. For 31 years he served in various California public schools as a teacher. Now retired, he enjoys family history and research, playing with his grand kids, traveling and volunteering in underperforming local schools.

Calaveras County provides many areas opportunities for him to explore and seek inspiration for his writings. This is not the first time Las Calaveras has enjoyed his work. In January of 2000 the journal featured another story by David about Charles Hendsch the emigrant tailor and the legacy he left to Copperopolis and Calaveras County.

For further information, you may email David Hendsch at [c.dhendsch@comcast.net](mailto:c.dhendsch@comcast.net).

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The Calaveras County Historical Society is a non-profit corporation. It meets on the fourth Thursday of each month in various communities throughout the County. Locations and scheduled programs are announced in advance. Some meetings include a dinner program, and visitors are always welcome.

The Society operates the Calaveras County Museum which is open daily from 10:00 to 4:00 in the historic County courthouse located at 30 Main Street in San Andreas; and the historic Red Barn Museum at 891 Mountain Ranch Road, also in San Andreas, which is open Thursday to Sunday, 10:00 to 4:00.

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 8:30 to 4:00, and the telephone number is (209) 754-1058, or contact us at: CCHS@goldrush.com; Red Barn Museum (209) 754-0800.

## New Members

*The Calaveras County Historical Society welcomes the following new members:*

### October, 2009

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Sandra Wallace—small photo album which belonged to Jessie Edora Lemieux Bruce with descriptions of photos, red glassware  
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