

MIWOK WEATHER PROPHET KEEPS UP OLD TRADITIONS

By
George Hoepfer

When smoke from chimney or campfire hangs low to the ground and flocks of little black headed snowbirds (juncoes) forage busily ... When deer begin moving to the warm, south slopes of foothill canyons, a storm is brewing. The time and manner in which leaves begin turning in the fall; the ebb and flow of natural springs. Those are some of nature's signs that 77 year-old George Wessell uses to forecast weather - sometimes weeks or months in advance.

A blustery February wind was blowing out of the North. Leaning on his elbows on the porch of his rancheria home, Wessell eyed the gray, overcast sky.

"Still plenty of winter to come," he said, "I look for a late winter with plenty of rain and snow falling well into spring."

That was nearly a decade ago, and, just as he predicted, that winter of 1983 was a long heavy one. And, before his predictions are taken too lightly, it might be well to remember that George forecast the drought years of 1976-77 and 1977-78. He also said the winter of 1979-80 would be wetter than usual, and again he was right. He also predicted the present drought. In 1987 George told friends, "We're gonna' see a change, see some dry years. I don't know how many, but I see them coming and they're going to be bad for both people and animals around here."

A native American, one of the Miwok people whose ancestors for thousands of years hunted and took their living from the foothills and mountains along the Western slope of the Sierra, George is a native of Ione, with family ties in Amador, Calaveras and Tuolumne Counties. Even as a child, he recalls, he was more interested in and observant of the natural phenomena that surrounded him, than others of his age. "Even then, I had a feeling for these things," he said.

As a youngster he wandered the hills with the older boys, learned to hunt and fish and sharpened his woodcraft skills. George leaned back in his chair and smiled: "I guess by today's standards we'd have been considered poachers because we hunted and fished year-round. But, things were not so easy then, and people had to eat."



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George Wessell, weather prophet.

He recalls that many of the older Miwok women in those days still were weaving baskets from natural materials they gathered in the woods and fields. Most of the baskets were sold, he said, but they kept some for ceremonial purposes. "No one, today, can duplicate that basketry," he said.

When George was growing up his father was employed as a foreman on a ranch on the edge of the valley, then the 1930's arrived and with them, the great depression. The ranch on which his father worked was taken over by a bank, and as the bank foreclosed on other ranches, the older Wessell found himself moving from place to place, at the bank's

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pleasure. Because of the enforced nomadic lifestyle which gave a youngster little chance to regularly attend school, young George Wessell suddenly found himself enrolled in the Stewart School for Indians, at Carson City, Nevada.

At first, George heartily disliked it -- the confinement of the classroom and dormitory style of living, the discipline and the fact that among other prohibitions, the students were sharply discouraged from conversing in their native tongue. To be caught speaking their tribal language brought swift punishment, he said.

"But, we learned and they taught us responsibility and how to work." Today he looks back, thankful for the solid education and training he received. However, study of the printed page did not dull George Wessell's interest in nature and observation of the natural world. In 1935 George graduated from the Stewart School and for the next four years worked on ranches or at foothill gold mines, wherever employment was available.

George also returned to hunting, fishing and wandering the mountains of Placer, El Dorado, Amador, Calaveras, and Tuolumne Counties, but start of World War II found him serving in the Army. After lengthy service overseas he received his honorable discharge in August, 1945. At that time the logging industry was booming and George quickly became involved as a contract logger. Shortly thereafter, he married Eiola Fuller, granddaughter of the late Chief Fuller, of Tuolumne, one of the recognized leaders of the Miwok people along the foothills of the Central Sierra.

Chief Fuller was noted in both the white and Indian community for his ability to predict weather, and from him, George claims, he gathered much of his own weather forecasting knowledge. To that, he admits, he also added his own observations.

"Chief Fuller was a very wise man in many ways and I learned much from him," said George. "But there was a lot he didn't tell us. He's gone now and he took an awful lot with him when he went."

Today, George Wessell does not go out of his way to publicize his weather predictions, but those who know him and hear his forecasts say he is

surprisingly accurate.

"Last fall when the rains came early and the grass sprouted real good, people began saying the drought was over. But my wife and I took some trips up into the mountains and we looked at the sugar pines and the white firs and at the way the acorns had fallen. I didn't like what I saw. I came back and I told them, "Hey, don't be too sure. I don't think we're going to have much of a winter."

Sure enough, the storms began tapering off. Not much snow really fell and here we are in another dry year."

George says many things have a part in telling him what the elements hold in store, concerning both long range and short range weather forecasting.

"Animals tell us a lot about what the weather is going to do," said George. "Deer keeping their summer coats longer than usual tell us its going to be a late winter, and, when the coats of the big mountain gray squirrels turn real silvery, the winter is going to be a hard one. When the big, topknotted Stellar jays leave the mountains and congregate in flocks in the foothills, look for a hard snow storm.

Even ants can tell you something," he said. "when you suddenly notice them becoming more active and you find them wandering in places where they had not been yesterday, a weather change is coming."

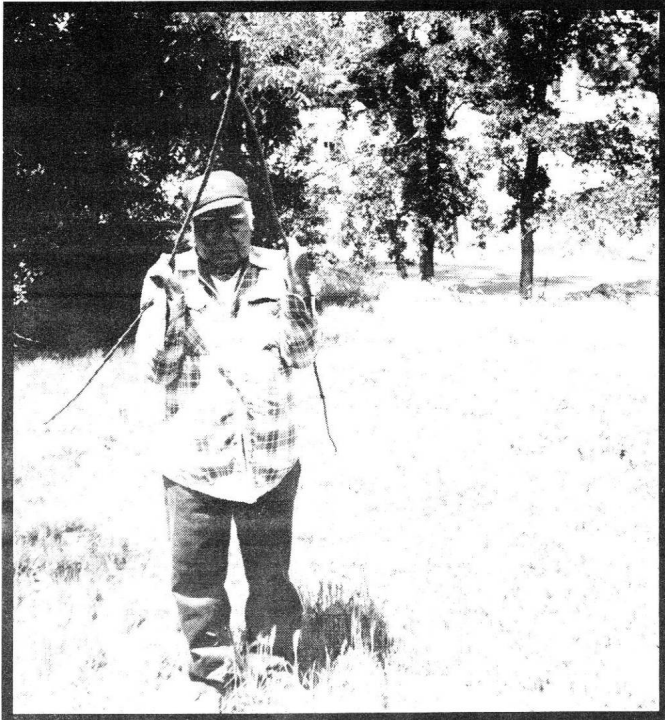
Another positive weather sign, he said, is that when natural mountain and foothill springs suddenly begin flowing more heavily, a storm probably is going to arrive within 24 hours.

"In the fall or early winter when a chill wind begins blowing out of the northeast, its a good idea to get out of the mountains as fast as you can, or at least, find warm shelter, for a cold snow storm is very likely coming," said George. Look for a storm he said, when clouds build and swallows skim low over the surface of ponds and when house flies try to get indoors and try to alight and cling stickily to your face and arms. Another sure sign is when old wounds or rheumatic bones begin to ache.

"Our people learned to predict weather because they had to," explained George. "Their food supply and their very lives depended on that ability. They watched the birds and the animals and the trees and bushes and the sky. I think they sometimes felt as

much as they saw the signs of a storm coming or of some change in the weather. Many times, whether they ate or went hungry depended a great deal on whether they were prepared for a storm."

Imagine what it would have been like to be caught in the mountains with women and children when a blizzard struck. They had to know if a storm was coming -- to be able to move ahead of it and to find safe shelter. Just as important, they had to know if a long dry spell was coming so they could move to where they



Locating water comes easy for Wessell

would be able to find plenty of food and water.

I think they always watched for signs, everything from the chirping of crickets to such things as whether or not, at night, there was a ring around the moon. I've learned to predict the weather a little," said George modestly, but sometimes I think if feel the weather change coming as much as I see it in the signs."

While some might say that George Wessell's weather predictions entail at least a certain amount of luck, another power he has developed over the years which produces more tangible results is his ability to locate sources of underground water. In fact he is considered one of the area's better "Dowsers" or water

ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS HONORED AT SOCIETY DINNER

A record 129 entries were submitted this spring by young people from throughout the county who participated in our historical society's 1991 Students' Historical Essay Contest. Winners of this year's competition received cash awards and certificates of merit following a pot-luck dinner at the society's April 16 meeting in the Metropolitan, in San Andreas. A total of \$780 was paid in cash to contest winners in three separate grade categories. First place received \$150, second place, \$75, and third place, \$35.

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witchers, and he often is called upon by well drillers to locate potential water sources. He has often located water down to depths of more than 200 feet and he also can tell with considerable accuracy, by the pull on his forked "witching stick", the volume of water that will be found there.

An example of his skill at locating not only water, but buried pipes or electric lines was amply demonstrated at a local lumber mill a few years ago. George was present while a back hoe operator was digging a trench across the mill yard. The job came to a sudden halt when the mill superintendent rushed out and announced that in the machine's path lay a buried 4,400-volt electric cable. The problem was, the superintendent couldn't remember just where.

Using a pair of metal rods George Wessell, within five minutes, located the buried line. It lay exactly two feet in front of the spot the backhoe had been digging.

Questions as to whether his skills are being passed on to members of the younger generation, George sadly shook his head.

"No, the young people today aren't interested - aren't learning much of the old culture or the old ways. Nobody much left to teach them. No leaders left. The kids -- too much television -- too many other things to do."

As for the present drought, George said that at this time he will make no predictions.

"Nature is punishing us," he said. "I'm not sure its over yet. Too early to make a forecast now for the coming winter. You come back in July, or maybe August and I can maybe tell you then."

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Subjects of their essays were chosen by the individual students and ranged over a broad field that included early day happenings, gold discoveries and biographical sketches of pioneer Calaveras families and individuals. Following the dinner, attended by more than 100 people, the first place winners in each of the three grade categories read their essays for the audience.

In the high school competition, top honors and a \$150 check went to Jessica Sommers Berry, a ninth grader at Calaveras High School, whose essay covered the history and present status of the Calaveras Big Trees.

Second place went to Dana Anderson, also a Calaveras High School ninth grade student, the title of whose essay was "When Calaveritas Was Wild." Dennis Morrisroe, a junior at Bret Harte High School, took third place with an essay titled, "The Illustrious History of Murphys Hotel".

In the Seventh and Eighth Grade competition, eighth grader Randy Bowersox, of Albert Michelson School, took first place with an interesting and well researched essay, "Moving Water in Calaveras County."

Michael Ray, a seventh grade home study student from Rainbow Ranch took second place with a well written article on the "Lost Town of Jesus Maria." Owen Stephens, himself a member of a pioneer Murphys family and an eighth grader at Albert Michelson School, took third place honors with his essay, "Ferries On the Stanislaus River."

First place in the Fifth and Sixth Grade category went to Carl Anderson, a fifth grader at San Andreas Elementary School, whose essay was titled "The Cannons of Calaveras County". Carl is the brother of Dana Anderson who took second place in the high school competition.

Second place went to Annie Singleton, a fifth grader at Hazel Fischer Elementary School, in Arnold, whose near perfectly written essay covered the subject "Early Eastern Calaveras County."

Jennifer Pratt, a sixth grader home study student who lives at the historic Gambetta Ranch, on Jesus Maria Road, took third place with another well-written piece titled "Stories from a Knot Hole."

Members of the historical society's 1991 Essay committees include Cathy Campbell, Ann Horvath, Lorraine Kennedy, Howard Little, Mary Matzek, Arlene Westenrider and George Hoepfer, chairman.

THE CANNONS OF CALAVERAS COUNTY

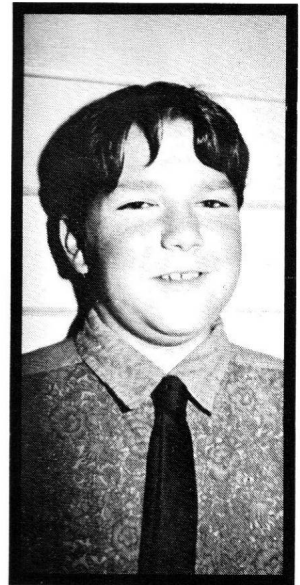
By
Carl Anderson

I became interested in the two Civil War cannons in the Protestant Cemetery in San Andreas for my essay. Doing the research on this, I found a great deal of information about the Civil War in Calaveras County. Even though we were so far away from the Civil War battlefields, Calaveras County men fought in the war.

Captain Hiram Messenger from Campo Seco sold his mining interests to outfit 128 men, called the 7th Regiment, California Volunteers. They trained at Drill Hill in Campo Seco and set out for San Francisco in November 1864. Instead of fighting in the Civil War back east, they fought in Arizona because the Confederacy was stirring up trouble with the Indians.

The people in Calaveras County were mostly too busy mining gold and copper to be fighting in the Civil War. Seventy percent of the copper used during the war came from California, most of it from Copperopolis. California's gold was important in financing the Civil War.

A group from Copperopolis, Union sympathizers calling themselves the Copperopolis Blues, purchased a cannon for training and ceremonies. This cannon probably came off a ship in San Francisco. It is a 6 pounder bronze gun manufactured in 1837 by Cyrus Alger & Co. Its serial number is 731. It was the sixth cannon "proofed" or approved by this company in 1837 and it weighed 731 pounds. "Old Abe," the Volcano cannon, was the fourth cannon proofed from the same batch, and weighed 737 pounds. Mr. Larry Cenotto, historian in Amador County said that these two cannons "are the oldest 19th century brass, U.S.



Carl Anderson

cannons in existence.”

For many years the cannon was neglected and located at the Union Mine waste dump. One day, during World War I, a scrap iron junk dealer came to town and took it away. He started down the road to Milton. Mr. William Vickery, the Copperopolis Blues member, overtook the dealer and returned the cannon to the town.

The scrap iron men came back and again tried to steal the cannon during the Depression Years and that seemed to give impetus for the placement of the cannon at the school grounds. On November 21, 1935 the people of Copperopolis gave a dance and dinner in the old Armory to raise enough money to put the cannon at the school. In 1936, Mr. Charlie Stone helped move the cannon to the school and his initials were put in the cement as “C.A.S. 1936”.

In 1989, the cannon had to be moved to a safe storage shed because of new building at the school.

I wish I had this much information about the two Civil War cannons in San Andreas. Almost nobody, even the Civil War experts in the county, knew that there are cannons in San Andreas.

These cannons are in the Veterans section of the Protestant Cemetery in San Andreas. Mr. Paul Barnett, of South Bend Replicas, in Indiana, identified them as 12 pound field guns, because the opening bore on the muzzle was 4 3/4 inches and the length was 53 inches. On the top of the muzzle there are the letters JWR and on the bottom, the numbers 24 on one and 78 on the other. Mr. Barnett says that “JWR” is the inspector’s initials and the numbers are the serial numbers.

The main identification is on the trunnions. These are the two projections that come off the barrel and hold the cannon in its carriage.

The caretaker of the cemetery said there was an attempt to steal the cannons in the late 1960’s so the cannons were cemented in and the trunnions covered up. The identifications are now buried in cement.

The only other marking that we can make out is a faint “U.S.” on one cannon. One cannon has right hand sight holes and the other has the sight mountings on the left.

Mr. Charles Stone told us the cannons were brought up on the Southern Pacific Railroad to Valley

Springs in the early 1920’s. They were picked up at the depot by Fred Winkler and he hauled them up to San Andreas.

Mr. Fred Winkler, Jr. of Stockton told us that it would have taken about an hour for his father to get to San Andreas on the old bumpy road with his old truck. The cannons were put in the back of the Masonic Hall in San Andreas. No one seems to remember when they were moved up to the cemetery.

What got me interested in the cannons was this true story from my friend Howard Little from San Andreas...



Cannons stand guard over Verterans' graves in San Andreas Cemetery
(*Historical Society photo*)

Howard and his friends were always late to high school. One day the secretary said if they were late on more time, they would get expelled. The next day they were late again. So they were expelled for one day.

They didn’t want to waste the day so they went back home. When they passed the cemetery and saw the cannons, one of them suggested they fire one off. They went home and got a stick of dynamite. But they knew if they used a whole or even a half stick, it would blow the gun off the carriage. So they got a quarter of a stick and went back to the cemetery.

When they got back they could barely flip one

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MOVING WATER IN CALAVERAS COUNTY

By

Randy Bowersox

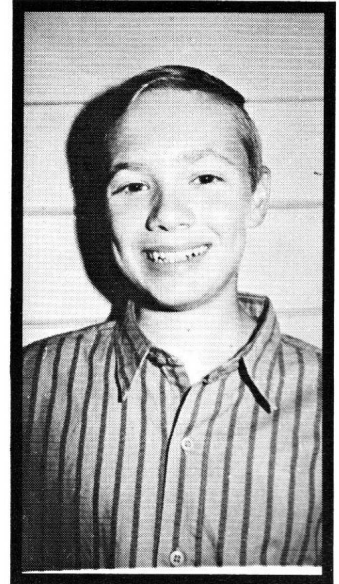
I have often walked along many flumes and ditches in our county, listening to the cool water as it gurgles and laps along. Some of the flumes span small valleys and creeks. Others are precariously perched, hugging deep canyon walls. I have seen the tracks of deer, bobcats, coyotes, and mountain lions who come to drink from the fresh swift water. Many people enjoy and benefit from these waterways which started back in the 1850's, during the mining days.

On January 29, 1852, Captain W.H. Hansford, Dr. William Jones, and others of Calaveras County decided to work together to bring water in a ditch from the Stanislaus River. They needed water for mining. In 1853, a group of men dug a ditch from Angels Creek about two miles above Murphys and took water along the hillsides to Owlsboro and Murphy's Flat. These camps only had water during the wet season because Angels Creek dried up early in the summer.

The Union Water Company was formed on May 4, 1854, to continue the development of waterways for the mining camps. The new company had 23 stockholders who paid \$80.00 each. Because they needed more money to buy nails, powder, tools, provisions and to hire more men, they sent some people to San Francisco to get a \$10,000 loan. The people came back without a loan after spending the 1,500 they had been given for the trip.

The company grew anyway, and more construction began. The Union Water Company

constructed the Union Canal to divert water from the Stanislaus River's North Fork to Angels Creek, a short distance above Murphys. The canal was about eighteen miles long. They built sawmills and cut lumber for the flumes. Unlike a ditch which is dug in the ground, a flume is an elevated water structure, usually made of wood. After the construction was finished, the water that was diverted into Angels Creek was taken



Randy Bowersox

out by the company and run in ditches and flumes to supply the different mining camps along the creek. Richard Augustus Keen wrote about earning \$100.00 a month while digging this ditch. He also described how a sawmill was built, and lumber for the flumes was floated down the ditch. He met Indians, heard about lions, and saw a grizzly bear cub.

One ditch took the water several miles below Murphys Camp south of the creek. While this ditch was being built, Mr. Torrey, who lived at French Gulch, built a ditch to take water from Angels Creek to French Gulch. Torrey and Company also put a dam across Angels Creek to turn water into their ditch below Murphys and above the ditch Union Water Company had dug to take the water to Angels Camp. This action set off all kinds of arguments. As a result, the Union Water Company sued Torrey

CANNONS, cont. from pg. 49

cannon over to get the fuse hole up. Now the cannons are both pointing south. Before, one used to be pointing north and the other south over the town.

Then they put the dynamite in and pulled the fuse through the powder hole. They sealed it with about 6 inches of mud and then they put in rocks, sticks and broken glass. One of them lit the fuse and then they ran back and hid behind tombstones. When it fired, it made a lot of noise and they ran away.

Howard said that it blew off a big old tree limb

and lots of small branches. The old caretaker came up and saw what happened, but he never saw Howard and his friends.

I would like to get permission to chip off the cement that covers the trunnions of these old cannons so we could see the markings. We hope to send this information to people who can identify them. I think the people of San Andreas should know as much about their cannons as they know about the Copperopolis cannon.

and Company to settle the problem of water rights.

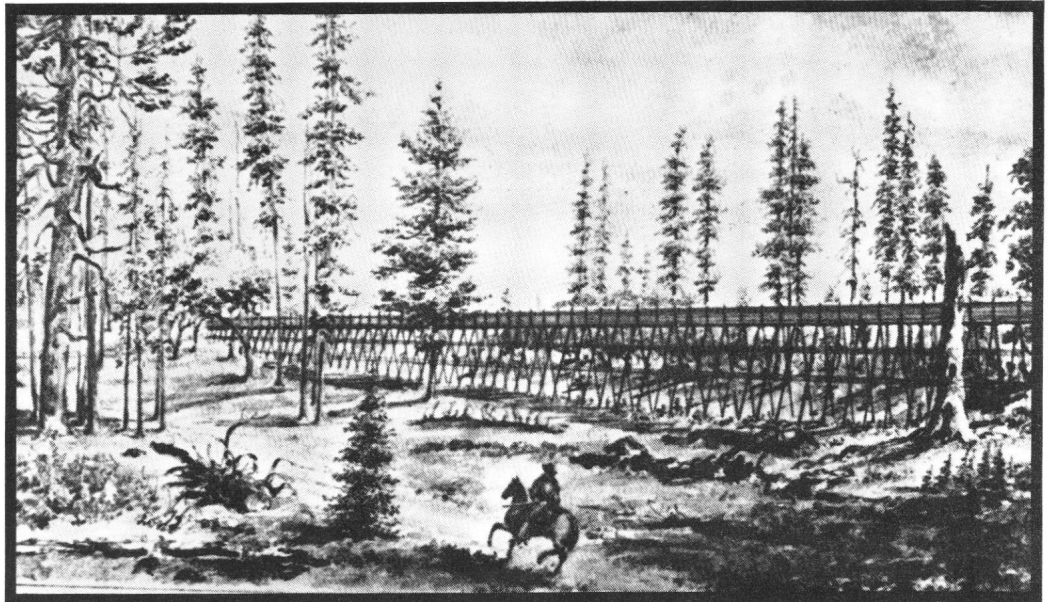
One of the jurors, Captain Leonard Noyes, wrote an interesting account of the trial which was held in 1854. Judge Alexander H. Putney, Justice of the Peace at Murphys Camp presided over the trial. The court was held in a big tent somewhere between 70 to 100 feet long. The tent which belonged to Bob Patterson was really a bar with liquors, a billiard table, two Monte tables, and a Roulette table which made the tent a very noisy place.

The court was right in front of the bar in the south end of the tent, and the jurors sat on a bench against the side. Most of the liquor was moved off the 25 foot table so that the court could use it. One end of the bar was not used by the court so that customers could get up to the bar and drink. Twelve honest miners were selected for the jury. After much discussion and debate, it was decided that they would get \$16.00 a day, eight of which they had to use to hire someone to work their claims.

This trial was very poor by today's standards, but very interesting and sometimes comical. Many times throughout the trial the judge and jurors were treated to cigars and drinks from people on both sides of the argument. The tent became so filled with smoke that it was hard to see, and usually the six lawyers had drinks sitting in front of them all the time. Jim Pearson who was a constable played a continual game of billiards during the trial. More than once, Judge Putney asked Jim to call someone, but Jim always asked the court to wait until he finished his play. The court didn't seem to mind waiting. A hundred miners and gamblers dressed in ragged clothes, broad rimmed hats, pistols and knives passed in and out of the door or stood around the gambling tables cursing their luck. Customers

stood two deep at the bar while five or six barkeepers waited on them. This was not your typical courtroom atmosphere.

When the jurors began to get tired, they would lean forward, putting their elbows on their knees. This bent position caused the tent wall behind them to bulge where their rears were. The temptation was too great. In no time, the boys outside stuck a pin through the tent and into the rear of Captain Stewart who jumped so far that he landed head first on the



The flume at Red Apple was a mighty structure in its day
(Historical Society Photo)

table right opposite the judge. Rubbing his behind and cursing and yelling. Stewart found that everyone, including the judge, was laughing. From that point on, the jurors made sure not to bend over and make bulges in the tent wall.

After about a week, the trial came to a close. The jury was taken to Sperry's first hotel which was unfinished at the time. Each Juror wrote a "P" for plaintiff or a "D" for defendant on a piece of paper. Captain Noyes was elected to count the votes. All of the jurors voted for the Plaintiff except for Dan Bell who wrote "X" because he didn't know the letters of the alphabet or what a plaintiff or defendant was.

The Union Water Company won the suit and continued to grow. They eventually extended their ditch, keeping it on the side hills. They supplied

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Through the Utica Ditch flowed the lifes blood of Murphys. (Calaveras County Archives)

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water to Murphys, Angels Camp, Smith's Flat, Dog Town, Hawkeye Ranch, Douglas Flat, Vallecito, and Carson Mill. The Union Water Company was not always well managed. The ownership of the ditch and lumber mills passed into the hands of Kimble and Cutting. Mr. Kimble died, leaving Mr. Cutting as the owner. In 1890, the Utica Gold Mining Company bought the stock, water rights, and property of the Union Water Company.

In 1891 to 1892, the Utica Gold Mining Company made several improvements. They constructed a dam on Silver Creek to form Silver Valley Reservoir which later became Lake Alpine. Shortly after, in 1893 to 1894, the company finished the Beaver Creek diversion and tunnel. They raised the dam at Union Reservoir and enlarged Utica Canal. They constructed a dam in 1905 at Utica Reservoir and made other improvements. A small hydroelectric power plant was constructed on Angels Creek above Murphys in 1895. Hunter's Dam was constructed on Mill Creek in 1927 to form a reservoir and divert

water into the Utica Canal. Work on Spicer Meadows Reservoir began in 1927.

In 1940, the power plant and water part of Utica Mining Company was continued by the Utica Power Company which was a joint venture of the Hobart Estate Company and the Estate of Emma H. Rose. On November 6, 1946, Pacific Gas and Electric Company bought the Utica Power Company. PG&E constructed a new Murphys Power plant in 1952 and made other improvements. The Northern California Power Agency has further improved the water system by building a new dam at Spicer Reservoir and a new tunnel to carry water from the mountains.

We will continue to find ways to move water where we want it, but the beginning of movement of water in Calaveras County was colorful and exciting. Many of the old flumes and ditches remind us of our early mining history. When we see Angels Creek full during the summer, we can be thankful for all the work the early Calaveras settlers did.

CALAVERAS BIG TREES

By

Jessica Sommer Berry

In 1969, a young man of eighteen entered the California State Park System and made a life-long commitment to protect all of California's natural resources. That man was my father and because of his career choice I have decided to research the spark that ignited the State Park System into what it is today. That spark was the Big Trees of Calaveras County.

Since their discovery in 1852 and continuing to the present, the Calaveras grove captured the attention of the world. Even though Calaveras Big Trees were the first to be discovered, the groves of Yosemite and King's Canyon were discovered shortly thereafter and proved to have more spectacular surroundings. This left the primary focus for preservation on the trees of King's and Yosemite. That does not diminish the fact that the attempt to log the Calaveras Big Trees started the preservation movement.

In 1833, Joe Walker and the Walker Party stumbled upon the Tuolumne and the Merced groves. In Walker's journal he mentioned the trees.

"Incredibly large - some of which would measure fathoms around the trunk at the height of a man's head from the ground" (Engbeck pg. 72)

After this entry, his writings turned strange and were not believed. In October of 1849, the first Sheriff of Mariposa County was pursuing livestock that had been stolen by the Indians. He found the great trees, but when he spoke of his discovery he was accused of being a story teller.

The man who finally convinced people that the Big Trees of Calaveras existed was A.T. Dowd. Mr. Dowd was chasing a wounded grizzly bear when he came across the Big Trees. Little did Mr. Dowd know his efforts to convince people that the Big Trees existed would create a chain of events that would lead to a major environmental movement for the preservation of the Big Trees and the creation of a system of parks committed to the preservation of California's natural and cultural resources.

In the 1850's, the great trees began to be discovered by fortune hunters. P.T. Barnum cut down a tree and took a section to show in the Crystal Palace. Meanwhile, in the North Calaveras Grove the "Mother of the Forest" was having its bark stripped off in 80 foot sections that could reach 116 feet tall. In the end, 60 tons of the bark was taken. One reporter stated,

"In its natural condition rearing its majestic head towards the heaven, and waving in all its natural vigor, strength and verdure, it was a sight worth a pilgrimage to see; but now alas, it is only a monument to the cupidity of those who have destroyed all there was of interest connected with it." (Engbeck pg. 77)

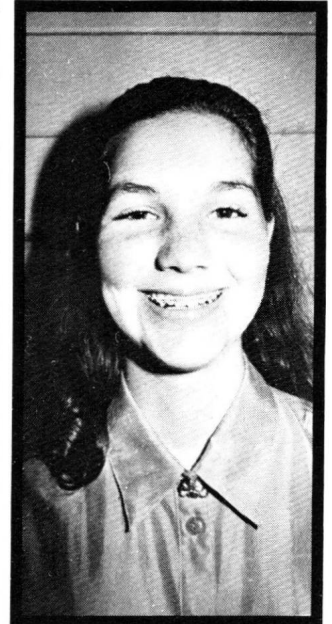
Another fortune hunter was a man by the name of Captain William Hanford. He cut down the largest tree in the Calaveras grove. Part of the stump was later used as a two lane bowling alley and bar. The other part, that measured twenty-five feet across was used as a dance floor.

One man who visited the trees referred to them as God's own flagpoles. One tree can weigh over 4,288,851 pounds and average 350 feet in the air. Perhaps the most amazing thing about them is how incredibly old they are.

"Old? They were old when the world was young!" - Reese (Fry pg. 33)

The oldest tree ever found was 3,126 years old. It is certain that they can live to be at least 4,000 years old. Scientists strongly believe that the trees could live over 10,000 years, if protected.

In July 19, 1853, Joseph Lapham and Billie
Please see **TREES**, pg. 54



Jessica Berry

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Lapham along with Smythe Hayes were continually spending too much money and in 1857 a lien was put on their property and a public auction was held. A successful partnership known as "Sperry and Perry" purchased the land.

In 1872, Asa Grey persuaded a man named John Muir to do some botanical explorations on the big trees and how they were affected by glaciers. Muir traveled mainly in the Sierra Nevada. In his travels he began to notice man's affect on the trees, such as logging, grazing, and commercial exploitations. In August, 1876, Muir attended a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and presented a paper. He theorized that cold air from glaciers blowing down deep canyons of the West Sierra had destroyed the Big Trees, and the existing giants were found in the only regions that the climates suited their needs to survive. He then concluded,

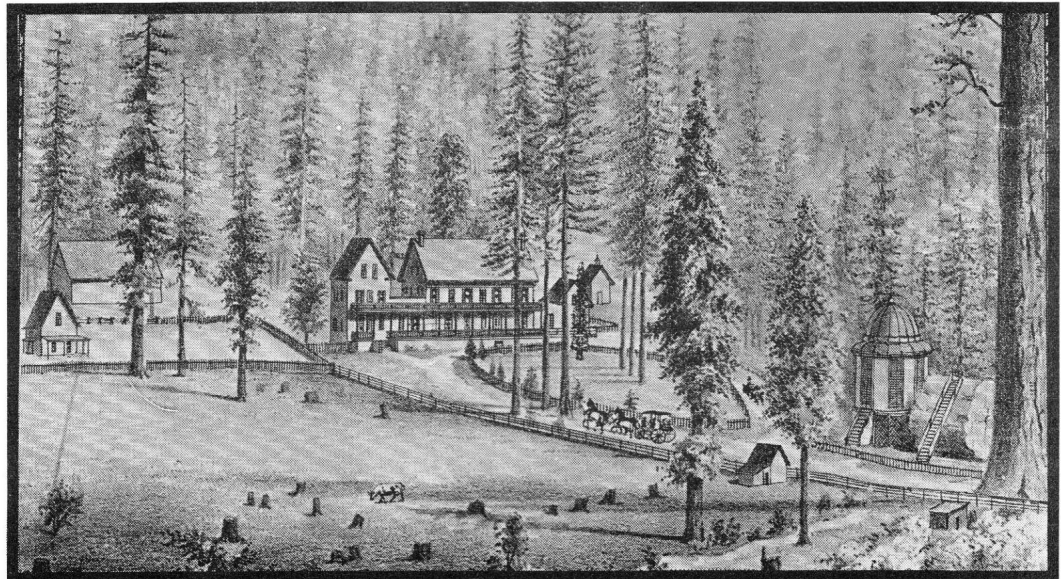
"The Forest King, had survived the ice age but faced the fire and steel of man; and unless protective measures be speedily invented and applied, in a few decades at the farthest, all that will be left of the Sequoia gigantea will be a few hacked and scarred monuments."
Muir (Engbeck pg. 89)

While Muir was campaigning to protect the Calaveras Big Trees 'Sperry and Perry' were making the best investment. Improved roads and rail services that brought Stockton, Sacramento, and San Francisco closer to the Big Trees were installed. Soon their land holdings were some 2,000 acres.

In 1874, things looked bad for the 'Sperry and Perry' partnership. It began with the sudden death of Perry. Sperry was forced to find a new partner to take Perry's place. He joined a new partnership with

a marquis but the two did not get along. They both agreed that they must separate, but neither was willing to give up the land. In August of 1877, the suit between Sperry and the marquis was decided and Sperry won complete control of the property. When Sperry gained control of the Calaveras Big Trees land he opted to sell. A date was set to auction the Big Tree property in December of 1877. John Muir and a number of University members heard of the sale and made a strong appeal to many state legislators to have the State of California buy the land and make it a state park so that it would be permanently protected. A man named Whiteside was the man who bought the land from Sperry and gained control of the South Grove of Calaveras. In the mid 1880's, the Calaveras Groves and the Mammoth Hotel began to slide from the public eye. After 1890, tour guides mentioned Calaveras Big Trees only as a side trip to Yosemite.

Since the discovery in 1852, and continuing till the present, the Calaveras Groves have been



Mammoth Grove Hotel during the 19th Century drew visitors from afar.
(Historical Society photo)

attracting tourists. They are the longest operating attraction in California. Calaveras is what brought the world to the trees and they were the trees to take the most abuse from the public. This started the idea of conserving the Big Trees.

With the money raised by the Calaveras Grove Association, the State gained control of the North Grove and surrounding land in 1931. In 1926 the Big



Magestic big trees dwarf visitors in their 1908 automobile. (Calaveras County Archives)

Tree land again changed hands when Mr. Whiteside sold the South Grove to the Pickering Lumber Company. Pickering disregarded the needs of the park when the company expanded its logging railroad right through the lower part of the South Grove. The State stepped in and acquired the land in 1954 and this sale is what made Calaveras Big trees a complete State Park, protected for years to come.

Today the Big trees of Calaveras are protected and out of danger, or are they? The State Park of Calaveras is in terrible danger. Everyone knows the State of California is desperately short of money. This could mean that California could have to shut down State Parks because of lack of funds. Severe cuts have already been made in the park system resulting in the lack of maintenance, which means Calaveras is already having difficulty caring for its natural resources.

Recently a review committee was formed to discuss ways to save limited park funds. The committee was asked to consider closing State parks as a means of saving money. I think all of us have taken the trees and their protection for granted. In

1931-1955, people were so concerned for the Big Trees that the public and different conservation groups wrote letters and contributed large amounts of money to save Calaveras by making it a State Park. The Rockefeller Foundation contributed one million dollars, Calaveras Grove Association gave \$65,000 dollars, and the State of California matched funds with \$1.07 million dollars, all to save the Big Trees.

So what is being done today? The truth is, if we don't take action soon the trees might not reach their life-span of 10,000 years. If John Muir and the people who fought so hard to protect the trees over 140 years ago were to hear of the crisis you can believe they would be ashamed and sad that the resource they protected for our generation may not be around for those to come.

IN MEMORIAM

Esther J. Cilenti, Modesto. April 14, 1992
Charles W. Goodell, San Andreas. April 14, 1992
Doris Tyrell, Mokelumne Hill. April 22, 1992

Calaveras County Historical Society

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

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

MEETING SCHEDULE

Unless otherwise scheduled, the Calaveras County Historical Society meets on the fourth Thursday of each month in various locations throughout the county. Dinner meetings open at 7 p.m. and non-dinner meetings at 7:30 p.m. All dinner meetings are announced to the membership in advance. The society does not meet in August.

This month's meeting which will feature the installation of new officers will be July 23 in the Black Bart Park, in San Andreas, and will include a barbequed dinner, served by host Don Cuneo. The dinner will be preceded by a social hour.

There will be no August meeting, and time, place and program for the September meeting is yet to be announced.

SCHOOL ALBUM AGAIN AVAILABLE

Once again, copies of our society's "Album of Pioneer Schools of Calaveras County," are available for sale to the public. The 131-page hard cover book contains scores of photos and information on the county's schools over a period ranging from the early 1850's through 1912.

In addition, it contains a map showing the location of each school as well as a tabulation of the county's early school districts in the order of their formation. It also included a brief history of the various schools and identified many of the teachers who taught in those early day classrooms. The albums are available in the historical society office and in the old courthouse museum at 30 North Main Street, San Andreas. They are priced at \$22.95 each.

NEW MEMBERS

Calaveras County Historical Society welcomes the following new members.

Cynthia Stephens, Murphys.
Marian Robinson, Mokelumne Hill.
Olive Martin, Stockton.
Zona Markus, San Leandro.
Lake Tulloch Real Estate, Copperopolis.
Lane Radar, San Andreas.
Gary & Virginia Bennis, Valley Springs.
Mrs. Lorraine Goldie, North Highlands.
Arthur Thurlough, Angels Camp.
Mr. & Mrs. John Fugazi, Stockton.
John W. Eproson, Stockton.
Wes & Arlene Hodgson, Valley Springs.
Ben & Penny Snyder, San Andreas.
Carl R. Kent, San Andreas.
George E. Frioux, Carmichael.
Mr. & Mrs. Felix Brenner, Sacramento.
Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Gentes, Arnold.
Mr. & Mrs. Rand Zeller, Valley Springs.
Viola S. Park, Minden, Nev.