



Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society  
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## SOME CALAVERAS SCHOOLS

By CHARLES SCHWOERER

At the hands of inevitable progress, most of the one-room schoolhouses in Calaveras County have disappeared. I think back fondly to the days when each community had such a school.\* Over the years, as transportation improved and the number of school children increased these small schools could no longer meet the demands of modern education. Educators today are quick to point out how inefficient these little old schools were. Yet, somehow, often with only partly trained teachers, they fulfilled their important part in the educational system of the day most effectively. For several generations many Calaverans received all the formal learning they ever had in the local one-room school.

A number of the county's schools go back more than 100 years. In fact, as early as 1851, the state legislature set up the framework of the public school system in California. It provided for the annual election of a school committee of three members in each district to supervise school affairs, examine and appoint teachers, disburse the funds, build schoolhouses, and report each year to the State Superintendent.

In May of the following year, Governor Bigler signed a bill making each County Assessor its Superintendent of Schools, ex-officio, and defined his duties. The bill also provided for the election of three County School Board members for a one-year term, assigned the Constables as census marshals, and set forth the duties of the district school trustees. This law further authorized the counties to levy a school tax not to exceed 5c on each \$100 of assessed valuation, considerably different from today's levy.

The first reference to a school fund in Calaveras is to be found in the proceedings of the Court of Sessions on October 14th, 1853, which ordered that out of the fifty cents levied on each \$100 for county purposes, 5c should be set aside by the Treasurer and reserved for the benefit of the "common" schools in the county. However, in December of the same year this order was replaced by one reducing it to two and one-half cents.

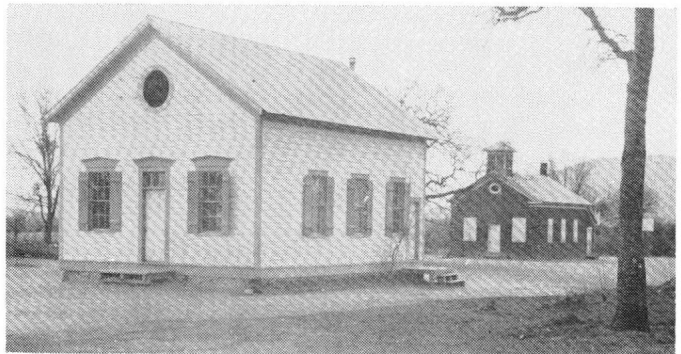
Prior to 1855, all recorded information referring to the schools is found in the proceedings of the Court of Ses-

\* Mr. Schwoerer started his long career in education as teacher in a one-room school. Later a principal, he then served many years as County Superintendent of Schools.



WILLOW CREEK SCHOOL

Wade Johnston was instrumental in forming the Willow Creek district, and served as a trustee for many years. The photograph shows how the picturesque building appeared before it was converted into a residence. Willow Creek School closed in 1949.



ALTAVILLE SCHOOL BUILDINGS

As enrollment increased, the original brick building became inadequate, and a second, wooden building was added. The State Forestry now occupies this site, which is commemorated by a historical marker.

sions. In that year the county Board of Supervisors came into being and in their minutes of April 10, 1855, they make reference to the first officer designated as a school official when they allowed F. B. Gall \$500 as County Superintendent of common schools.

The first elected Calaveras County Superintendent was Robert Thompson who was chosen at the election held on September 2, 1857.

The first school district established by the Board of Supervisors was at Vallecito. The minutes of Nov. 15, 1855, read, "In the matter of the application of the citizens of Vallecito Township No. 9 for a new school district it is ordered by the board of supervisors that a new school district be created for Vallecito and vicinity."

Have you invited a friend to join the Calaveras County Historical Society?

## Some Calaveras Schools

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In the Murphys district, private schools were being held in the early fifties, and it is probable that Murphys, Angels, Campo Seco, Cave City, Mokelumne Hill, and San Andreas had already established school districts when school legislation became operative in the county in 1854. Certainly they were established before the Board of Supervisors was instituted.

Altogether there were sixty-six districts set up in the county, but the greatest number in operation at any one time was fifty-seven. In 1923, there were forty-seven elementary districts still in existence, of which forty were active. But by the end of 1930, fifteen of these had been "lapsed" into adjoining districts. In 1930, West Point and Lincoln joined to form West Point Union district; Cave City and Banner formed El Dorado Union in 1946; Angels, Carson Hill, and Robinson Ferry merged into the Mother Lode Union in 1948, and the Mark Twain Union was created when the Mother Lode Union and Altaville voted on July 21, 1950, to unite. On December 29, 1953, Jenny Lind and Evergreen Union was voted. And the following year, the Calaveras Unified School District came into being, including all the elementary districts except Mark Twain Union and Vallecito.

Thus, 112 years after its formation, Vallecito is the sole surviving independent school district in the county.



**CAMANCHE SCHOOL**

The Camanche school was discontinued in 1955 and its pupils bussed to Valley Springs. However, the building remained until destroyed to make way for Camanche Lake.

## Necrology

We very regretfully record the passing on of five of our beloved members:

Mr. Claude Smith, West Point (Charter Member)  
Mrs. Dollie Peek, Murphys (Charter Member)  
Mrs. Grace Lytle, Mokelumne Hill  
Mrs. James E. Gericke, Fallon, Marin County  
Miss Mary Bess Norton, Murphys



**MOUNTAIN RANCH SCHOOL**

Located in the upper part of town, this building was in use until 1946. One of the earliest formed in the county, this school district took its name from booming Cave City, nearby.

## May Meeting

Mr. Richard Stockton, teacher at Calaveras High school, presented seven of his students from a special study class, each giving a paper on the subject, "Which Calaveras Community has the Most Historic Value?" The papers were excellent and the program was well received by the group present at the meeting. We hope Mr. Stockton will continue with this project next year.

## June Meeting

A pleasant innovation was started this month by having a half-hour social before the meeting, held downstairs in the Grange Hall. Mr. Harry Bagley, feature writer for the Stockton Record, gave a talk on his discovery of the Demarest Papers and their donation to the Stuart Library at U. O. P. New officers were elected for the coming year.



**VALLEY SPRINGS SCHOOL**

A view taken about 1935. The smaller building (on the right) was originally the Cloverdale school, on the Valley Springs-Linden Road, and was moved to Valley Springs at the time of the Pardee Dam construction, after there was no longer need for it in the Cloverdale district.

## A SUPERCARGO'S SEA CHEST

A most interesting relic of the gold rush came to light recently in Angels Camp. While casually inspecting an old wooden chest that he found in his uncle's garage, carpenter Raullin Lagomarsino was surprised to see an inscription pencilled inside the lid, as follows:

### Ship Singapore, 623 Tons Register

Capt. Chas. W. Hamilton  
Cape of Good Hope Nov. 16th, 1851  
Calcutta Jan. 14th, 1852  
St. Helena June 11th, 1852  
Cape of Good Hope May 23rd, 1852  
Boston July 2nd, 1852  
Abraham Howard  
Charles W. Brooks      Supercargo's clerks

### Clipper Ship John Gilpin, 1089 Tons Register

Capt. Justus Doane  
New York Oct. 29th, 1852  
Cape Horn Dec. 20th, 1852  
San Francisco Feb. 1st, 1853  
Honolulu Mar. 10th, 1853  
Singapore Apr. 20th, 1853  
Calcutta May 20th, 1853  
Lands Heads July 13th, 1853  
Penang Aug. 9th, 1853  
Acheen Head, Sumatra Aug. 14th, 1853  
Cape Good Hope Sept. 14th, 1853  
Boston, Mass., U.S.A. Nov. 10th, 1853

### Clipper Ship Northern Light (tonnage illeg.)

Capt. Hatch  
Sailed from Boston (date gone) 1854  
Arrived at San Francisco (date gone)

This old sea chest, still in excellent condition, must have belonged to two ship's clerks who sailed on clipper ships on the San Francisco run during the gold rush. The chest was probably made for Abraham Howard, for remnants of his name are painted on the outside. Later it must have been acquired by his shipmate, Charles Brooks, who presumably wrote the record of their landfalls and departures inside the lid.

It is quite apparent that when the "Northern Light" arrived in San Francisco in 1854-55, young Brooks packed his belongings in his chest, was paid off, and headed for the gold diggings. Or just as likely, along with some of his fellow seamen, he quietly lowered his chest over the side, under the cover of darkness, and left the "Northern Light" to get along as best she could without him.

The "Singapore," a small ship, was just a merchantman. The "John Gilpin," on the other hand, was a crack clipper and one that regularly gave a good account of herself. On her maiden voyage (the one chronicled in the chest) she came close to making a record, taking only 93 days on the westbound trip from New York to "Frisco." Only one other clipper that year, the "Flying Fish," made better speed, beating the "Gilpin's" time by one day. Captain Arthur Clark, in his authoritative work, "The Clipper Ship Era," speaks of this passage as follows:

"The match between the 'Flying Fish' and the 'John Gilpin' was exceedingly close . . . The 'John Gilpin' sailed out past Sandy Hook, October 29, 1852, followed by the

'Flying Fish' on November 1st, and before the green Highlands of Neversink had disappeared below the horizon both ships were under a cloud of canvas. The 'Flying Fish' fanned along through the doldrums and crossed the equator 21 days from Sandy Hook, leading the 'John Gilpin' by one day. From the line to 50 degrees South, the 'John Gilpin' made the run in 23 days, passing the 'Flying Fish' and getting a clear lead of two days. The 'Flying Fish' did some fine sailing here; dashing through the Straights of Le Maire, she came up alongside the 'John Gilpin' just off the Horn, and (Captain) Nickels, ever famous for his jovial good-cheer, invited (Captain) Doane to come aboard and dine with him, 'which invitation,' the 'John Gilpin's' log-book ruefully records, 'I was reluctantly obliged to decline.' This is perhaps the only instance of an invitation to dine out being received off Cape Horn . . .

"The 'Flying Fish' . . . made the run from 50 degrees South in the Atlantic to 50 degrees South in the Pacific in 7 days, leading her rival by two days. From this point to the equator, the 'Flying Fish' was 19 and the 'John Gilpin' 20 days. From here the 'John Gilpin' showed remarkable speed, making the run to San Francisco in 15 days, a total of 93 days, closely followed by the 'Flying Fish', 92 days from Sandy Hook."

The old sea chest in Angels Camp is, no doubt, one of the few articles that was carried around the Horn on that famous voyage, so many years ago, that is still extant.

The same year (1853), the "Northern Light," another beautiful clipper, under Captain Freeman Hatch, returned from San Francisco to her home port of Boston in 76 days, a record passage never beaten. Her best day's run of 354 miles eloquently testifies to the speed of these remarkable sailing ships, and to the seamanship of their commanders and crews. The owner of the chest joined the "Northern Light" in Boston, on her next California voyage, and then went "to see the elephant."

The "Northern Light" and the "John Gilpin" were both Boston built and owned. The "Gilpin" collided with an iceberg in '58 and foundered — all hands being saved by another ship. The "Northern Light" had a much longer history and was owned and commanded in her later years by Captain Joshua Slocum, famous for his single-handed trip around the world in the sloop "Spray."

## Essay Winners

### High School Division

- 1st — Jackie Anderson, Murphys  
"E Clampus Vitus"  
2nd — Karen Peek, Mokelumne Hill  
"Mary Conway Wesson"  
Hon. Men. — James Waters, San Andreas  
"Henry Sullivan, or a Most Unforgettable  
Character"

### 7th and 8th Grade Division

- 1st — Roger Shipp, San Andreas  
"Early History of North Branch"  
2nd — Kathie Mathos, Mokelumne Hill  
"The Historic Town of Mokelumne Hill"

Pres. and Mrs. George Poore attended the annual meeting of the Conference of California Historical Societies, held at Oroville, in June.

