



ETHNIC INFLUENCE ON GOLD RUSH ARCHITECTURE IN CALAVERAS COUNTY

by Charity Maness

With the gold rush came a massive influx of immigrants to the area, each bringing with them their customs, their culinary delights and their architectural influence. When mixed with the customs and designs of the locals, Calaveras County began to take on an architectural flavor all its own with styles ranging from Neoclassical to Craftsman, Italianate to Queen Anne and with many variations on the styles and multiple revival themes.

While early buildings in the county were often built from wooden frames and canvas, as time moved forward, and many fires razed the small canvas communities, the need for permanence began with the incorporation of buildings built of adobe, stone, brick, or concrete. The camps began taking on the appearance of small towns, often touting schools, churches, stores, blacksmith shops and such.

Building began in earnest when materials such as rhyolite—a rock composed principally of quartz and feldspar minerals resembling granite—became readily available from local quarries. There are rhyolite buildings still standing in

Angels Camp, Altaville, Murphys, and San Andreas. The grand Utica Mansion in Angels Camp was constructed of dressed rhyolite blocks in 1882.

Other local stones that were used include schist, marble, greenstone and granite. The American Hotel building, now the County Archives, was constructed using all these types of rock. The beautiful marble across the top and along the sides of the Hall of Records, one of two Romanesque Revival buildings in San Andreas, was quarried in Valley Springs and San Andreas. Lava rock was another important building material and it was commonly used in Angels Camp. The Angels Hotel, John Peirano Home with its 1 ½ foot thick walls, Carpenters' Union Hall, and the Stickle Hotel were all built with lava rock.

Italian Stonemasonry in Angels Camp

During the period of the 1880s through 1910s, often referred to as 'the second gold rush', most of the buildings constructed in downtown Angels Camp were frame buildings with false fronts, yet a few were built by Italian stonemasons.



The Calaveras County Bank building on Main Street in Angels Camp.
Calaveras Historical Society Photo.

Italian stonemasons Bartolemeo and Geobatta Gazzola's creations still stand today as a testament to their masonry skill. Their buildings were easily noted by their stone side walls, framed facades and interiors. The Gazzolas built Woods Hall, which burned in 1941; the Central Park Hotel with a 1930s first floor façade; and the Barantono Building which was remodeled with a slumpstone façade in the early 1970s.

Calaveras County Bank, located at 1239 Main Street Angels Camp, is a testament to the creation of elegance through immigrant influence. The building was specifically constructed as a bank, shortly after the Calaveras County Bank was incorporated, as noted in the *Amador Ledger* of March 30, 1900:

"Articles for incorporation for a bank, to be known as the Calaveras County Bank, and to be established at Angels Camp, were filed with the County clerk last Saturday. The capital stock of \$50,000 has all been subscribed, the stockholders being George C. Tryon Sr, Warren Rose, D. D. Demarest, F. J. Solinsky, John Raggio and Joseph Peirano of this county and H. Brunner of San Francisco."

The building was designed by French architect E. Depierre and Italian architect Persea Pighetti. The contractor A.G. Borbe was from Germany. The

building itself was constructed of native stone by Bartolemeo Gazzola.

Seemingly no detail was overlooked in the design of this bank. The bank is a two-story Classical Revival stone building; the first floor measuring 12 feet 6 inches in height and the second floor measuring 11 feet 6 inches in height. Gracing the tiled entry stoop are green mosaic tiles spelling out the word 'bank'. The bank also featured an outside bathroom in the rear yard.

The Calaveras Community Bank was nominated to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982 by Judith Marvin and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on August 1, 1985.

According to detailed research by Marvin of the Foothill Resources, *"The interior of the bank is furnished with the original vault, hexagon white tiles with green tiled Greek Key perimeter design on the floors, white marble wainscoting with green marble baseboard, marble topped banking table... the stairway leading to the upstairs was of Mendocino Pine, the newels were fancy turned Spanish Cedar. Walton's Lincrusta wallpaper wainscoted the stairway and the second story hallway and offices. The trim was oak grained, and the trimmings were shellacked and rubbed with oil. The hardware was brass and the door butts figured iron*



St. Basil Serbian Orthodox Church.
Calaveras County Historical Society Photo.

with acorn tips... A skylight lit the upstairs hallway and plaster rosettes held the lighting fixtures. The upstairs bathrooms had marble molded sinks with nickel plated faucets."

Note: The Classical Revival style was popular during the Gold Rush in Calaveras County and throughout the Mother Lode. These stone buildings featured French doors and iron shutters.

Serbian Orthodox Church

Directly across from the historic Lightner Mine in Angels Camp sits the Serbian Orthodox Church. The church and its unmistakable sky-blue cupola and stained glass windows welcome visitors to the historic section of Angels Camp with clear immigrant influenced architecture. During Lightner Mine's operational years—1850s to 1915—a high number of immigrants, many

from Serbia and the surrounding countries, worked the mines and set down roots.

Whether the Slavic peoples immigrated to America in the late 1800's to escape their war torn country in search of a better life or they intended to strike it rich in the gold mines, they each brought with them a strong connection to their God and a desire to worship their God in their way. The Slavic immigrants of Angels Camp chose to invest in their culture and their people by purchasing land for a church on November 17, 1909. By December 6th of that same year the church, built by parishioners, was completed with its first consecration celebration and dedication held the following year on August 14, 1910.

The church was named for patron saint St. Basil of Ostrog, more commonly known as St. Basil. It held the name of Sveti Vasilije Ostoski, Cudotvora (St. Basil of Ostrog the Wonderworker) and served the masses of Serbian miners in Angels Camp who emigrated to America from areas such as Serbia, Hercegovina, Montenegro, the Bay of Kotor and Croatia.

The church was built for worship, not necessarily for comfort. For many years the lengthy



Looking towards the altar inside the Serbian Church.
Photo by Charity Maness, 2017.

services were held without the comfort of chairs. Today chairs are available for parishioners yet restrooms still remain nonexistent. There is no hall for gathering before or after a service and heat and air conditioning was only installed in the last decade. The sparse surrounding notwithstanding, the gentle and hushed reverence of the building calls to those who follow.

The entrance to the historic church boasts two sets of heavy double doors. Through the first set one enters a small vestibule the area where memorabilia of the church's humble beginnings adorn the walls. Through the next set of double doors, the parishioner enters the hallowed sanctuary. The sanctuary is softly lit during the day through multiple paned stained glass windows and the walls are adorned with paintings of saints within the Serbian Orthodox religion.

At the front of the church is a curtained and saloon style swinging door entry in a false wall to a room where only a few are allowed to enter; never women. In front of the false wall stands a simple wood podium and a table on either side carrying a series of candlestick holders. Hanging from three hooks near the center door on the false wall are three ornate incense censers each hanging by four chains. The four chains in various orthodox churches represent evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, who wrote the four gospels that are in the Holy Bible.

While the inside could be considered a common scene for a church, it is the outside that makes St. Basil stand alone. Atop the church is a sky blue cupola, often termed a crest or summit, constructed of sheet metal over a wooden frame. According to many orthodox religions the presence of a single cupola signifies Christ, the sole head of the Christian community. Blue within orthodox churches is often a color associated with the "God

bearer," or mother of Jesus, Mary. Atop the cupola a cross stands regal.

While the church, in its heyday, was home to more than 40 families, the doors are closed most of the year, opening only for special services and special occasions such as weddings and funerals.

Chinese Architectural Influence

Fiddletown was founded by Missouri miners in 1849, and was located in Calaveras County from 1850 up to May 11, 1854, when swaths of land were torn from El Dorado and Calaveras counties to create Amador County.

From its beginnings the community became prominently Chinese and with it Chinese architecture lead the way. The historic buildings remaining in Fiddletown tell a tale all their own.

On the Main Street of Fiddletown there can be found a few different architectural designs; each with their own distinction. Some examples of these various designs are: a rammed earth adobe Chinese herb doctor store; an iron door laden Chinese gambling hall made from locally manufactured brick and gathered stone; the Gothic Revival style of the Cooper House; and the well constructed Blacksmith and Wagon shop made of rectangular hewn blocks of Valley Springs rhyolite tuff.



The Chew Kee Store in Fiddletown.
Photo courtesy Amador Gold, unknown date.

Coming to America was quite a change for Chinese immigrants. Work was hard, pay was low and often they were forced to live outside the main camp with little to no running water and very few natural provisions. However, this did not hinder the forward progress of some.

In 1850 the rammed earth adobe building that housed Dr. Yee Fan-Chung, local Chinese herb doctor, was completed. It was his home, office and store. When Dr. Yee Fan-Chung's rammed earth herb store was first completed it had two doors and four 16 pane windows with iron shutters. The home measured 34 feet long by 21 feet wide with walls ranging between 22 and 24 inches thick. The mud packed walls allowed for a cool interior during the hot summer months. The roof, now made of corrugated metal, originally was covered with wooden shingles. The wood flooring was made from hand hewn wood.

Research shows that rammed earth buildings date back to pre 79 AD in China. In fact, parts of the Great Wall of China are reported to have been made from rammed earth. The ramming of adobe earth takes a series of considerations to create a building that will withstand the test of time.

Soil composition, form creation, special tool design and thermal considerations all play an important role. Soil compositions must contain sand/gravel, silt, clay, lime, cow manure, salt, and a very small percentage of organic matter. To construct a rammed earth building, the soil is shoveled into forms and packed down to at least 50% of its original height. This process is recreated over and over until the desired height is reached.

The Chew Kee Store is now open to the public as a museum operated by the Fiddletown Preservation Society.

The Sam Choy Store, while not a rammed earth building, is one of only two remaining Chinese buildings left in Angels Camp and is significant to Mother Lode history. The brick and stone Classical Revival building was built in 1860 by Sam Choy, a prosperous Chinese merchant. Choy occupied the building until 1892 when it was sold to Walter Tryon. The building has also served as a brothel and the city jail.

Other Architectural Styles

The Gothic Revival was a prominent architectural style in California during the Gold Rush; from San Francisco to the towns along the major

waterways, and in the gold fields. The features of this style include steeply pitched roofs, decorated vergeboards or bargeboards (carved ornate boards placed along the gable of the roof), and pointed arch windows. The stately Thorn Mansion in San Andreas is a notable example of this type of architecture. The three-story brick home was built in 1861 for Sheriff Benjamin K. Thorn. The Sperry House in Murphys is a Gothic Revival home, which features a central arch window, over the front door and under the steeply pitched roof. The home was built in 1857 by Judge Alexander H. Putney, and purchased by James Sperry in 1862.

After the Gold Rush, California's new-found wealth created a rise in Victorian and Neo-Classical architecture. Though limited in Calaveras, the trend blossomed in San Francisco and Sacramento; major trade routes for the gold found in the earth and mines of Calaveras. The Victorian homes in Calaveras County are of the Queen Anne style. There are several Queen Anne style homes in San Andreas including the Whitlock Mansion and the Snyder House, which is now the Robin's Nest Bed & Breakfast.

Even today, while other state capitols adorn their rooftop with a statue, the California State Capitol is ornamented with a gold-plated copper ball, a vivid reminder of and tribute to California's Gold Rush history.

I wish to thank Judith Marvin for allowing me to access her expansive historical architectural knowledge.

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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.

October–December 2017

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Roger Shipp—Atascadero
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Michelle Roman—Kingsburg (Gift membership)
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Charlene Winkler—Vietnam uniform, cap, hat, and medals worn by Ralph Winkler, saddle