



IT WAS A WOW EVENING (NEARLY A CENTURY AGO)

by Larry Getchell

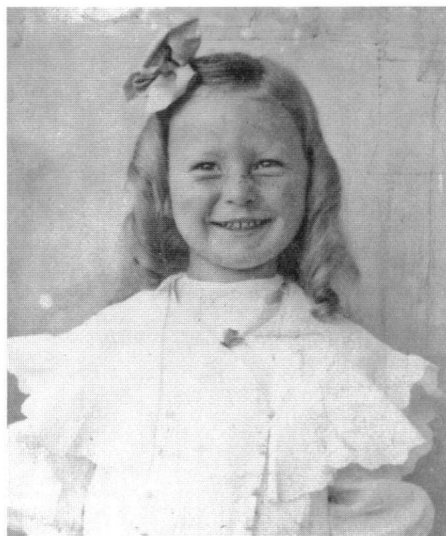
It's fast approaching a century since that memorable Circa 1908 Saturday night affair took place, the W.O.W. (Women of Woodcraft) gala entertainment followed by a dance that didn't end until daybreak Sunday morning. Yes, this then four year old was there and played an important role which you will be able to understand if you follow me to the end of this narrative.

November 15, 1907, my birthday, the Grant Getchell family that included my mother and me, little four year old Harold, left Sheep Ranch, conveyed by our four year old horse Delly and the cart, for residence in San Andreas. My father's brother Clarence, the newspaper man, had rented us a house on lower St. Charles Street. Neighbors across the way were the James Luddys and the George Treats.

It was a custom during that day to cordially welcome newcomer families to the town, especially the housewife who could in due time expect a visit from one of the town's lady representatives. This did happen to mother and in some way the ladies had been informed

that "little Harold" had a musical voice or at least he could carry a tune. (During the 18 years before leaving San Andreas I was referred to as Harold, my middle name.)

There was a Women of Woodcraft entertainment and dance coming up and there was a desperate need and search for talent. My mother was asked if perhaps "little Harold" might be available for a contribution. Let me say



Young Harold Getchell, circa 1907, shown here with his lovely blond curls, much as he would have appeared in the WOW show. Photo from the files of the Calaveras County Historical Society.

that mother, without a minute's discussion with "little Harold", volunteered my services. Mrs. George Treat just across the street was a member of the entertainment committee and she also played the piano. For the next several weeks mother trotted me over to the Treat's home where under Mrs. Treat's direction we rehearsed a little ditty, titled "Mother is My Sweetheart." Following a few rehearsals I had the number down pat and could practically perform it forward and backwards. As of today the melody has escaped me and all I can recall of the lyrics is the title which was repeated several times.

The W.O.W. event had been freely advertised throughout the County and

a large crowd was expected. The actual crowd estimated at 400 greatly exceeded the expectations. It all took place in the Metropolitan Theatre and dance hall at the corner of Main and Court Street, adjacent to the Metropolitan Hotel. For spectator use there were ten foot wide benches, arranged in aisles and removable for dancing. All seats were taken on this Saturday night with an overflow crowd standing at the back of the hall.

The entertainment, all local talent I should add, had a starting time of 8 o'clock. Earlier mother had taken me back stage. I was all decked out in starched white with white stockings and white shoes. I sported shoulder length blond curls to top (pardon the expression) everything off. For reasons I am unable to explain, my act was scheduled as the opener. I always supposed it was because it was about time for my nap. Mother had me in tow between one of the theatre wings located at the extreme right side of the stage. The piano was down on the main floor at the extreme left. At eight o'clock they raised the curtain. Mrs. Treat took her place at the piano and on a given signal mother shoved me out on the stage. I waddled across to the other side to be as close to Mrs. Treat as possible. The audience applause sort of shook me up. I decided it was because they liked my new outfit about which I was a bit proud. I now stood waiting for Mrs. Treat to start playing. The applause and the importance of the event must have impressed Mrs. Treat because without previous warning she decided on an introductory vamp, something we had not rehearsed, choosing to play several bars of the chorus. I thought, what goes here? Without a moment hesitation I sailed right into the chorus and to hell with the verse. A startled Mrs. Treat stopped playing immediately and I stopped too. She now began with the verse just as we had rehearsed it and I followed along without any mistakes.

With the song over I waddled back across the stage to mother who was waiting for me with open arms. For whatever reason she had tears in her eyes. I figured I must have done something wrong but she said I was great. That ended my contribution to the evening's entertainment and I don't recall too much about what took place later. It probably was time for my nap. I do remember an act where the men sat around in a semi-circle and each performed in turn. The performance I remember best was that of George Treat, Mrs. Treat's husband. He sang a little number titled, "If I kick the 'L' out of Kelly, will Kelly kick the 'L' out of me?" Old George, who actually wasn't that old, accented the "L" with a high kick which brought down the house.

Johnny Halley told a joke. He asked, "Why is so and so like a young colt?" "Why," asked one of the others back, "is so and so like a young colt?" "Because," said Johnny, "he won't work until he's broke." Most everyone laughed

but that joke was the subject of some talk in the days that followed. The so and so that Johnny mentioned was a town dude and it was true that an industrious pursuit was to him an unknown quantity. But he had friends and relatives.

As to the affair itself it netted the W.O.W. event a neat profit.

Following the entertainment the benches were removed with a number of them placed along the wall for the ladies' comfort. The men folk all stood at the rear of the hall, leaving only to request the favor of a dance with a lovely partner or to step outside for a smoke. The dance selections for that day were the waltz, schottische, polka with a Virginia Reel and a John Paul Jones on the program at least once during the evening. Every so often they formed sets for square dancing but I do not remember who was the caller. I slept through the most of this anyway. They bundled me up in a blanket and placed me on a corner bench.

The dances I mentioned were those performed in 1908, Mr. Fox having not yet introduced his dance. The Vernon Castles came along a little later also. There was a break at mid-night for a macaroni spread over at the Hotel. Dancing was resumed at One o'clock, lasting until the break of dawn. It was an affair folks remembered for some years to come.

NOTES ABOUT THE AUTHOR...

Our author, Little "Harold" Getchell, or Larry as we came to know him in later years, was born in Sheep Ranch in 1903. The family moved to San Andreas around 1907 after his father suffered a severe accident in the Sheep Ranch mines. The senior Getchell was prompted to give up his carpentry job in the mines and instead chose to run a saloon. Larry's uncle was the famous Clarence Getchell, proprietor of the **Calaveras Prospect** newspaper in San Andreas. For more info on the Getchell family, please refer to an extensive article written by Larry printed in *Las Calaveras* in October 1999.

In later years Larry lived in the Bay Area but always maintained contacts with his roots. He joined the Calaveras County Historical Society in 1965 and for over thirty years he maintained a vigorous correspondence with at least three editors of *Las Calaveras*. Larry fancied himself a writer, and wrote numerous short stories and humorous recollections of his youth and life in early Calaveras County. Many of his writings swell the files of the Historical Society. Several of his musings were printed in *Las Calaveras* or the **Calaveras Prospect** over the years. An earlier, abbreviated version of this W.O.W. story was first printed by the **Prospect** on November 16, 1995. Readers interested in perusing more of Larry's writings may consult the extensive files of the Historical Society.

In another recollection, Larry tells us a story about a child living among the adults who frequented his father's saloon, much to his proper mother's dismay. "Some say I had a rather good singing voice as a child" boasted Larry in a letter to the Historical Society dated March 29, 2000. "On one occasion during one of my visits, some customers got me to sing and I was rewarded with some five cent pieces. My mother was unhappy about this and it didn't happen again." Apparently that incident put an end to Larry's professional singing career.

These stories afford us a rare first-hand glimpse of San Andreas social life at the turn of the (last) century as seen through the eyes of a child. Without the benefit of television or movie theaters, entertainment was live. A social event such as the W.O.W. show and dance would have been an exciting and anticipated event not to be missed.

The Women of Woodcraft mentioned in this story were an organization of women with a chapter in San Andreas. The Women of Woodcraft were the female branch of the fraternal benefit organization, the Woodman of the World,

a group similar to the Elks or Moose. Neither organization had anything to do with logging, and both groups referred to themselves as the "W.O.W." Those organizations may have their own stories to tell, but their only involvement in this story is as the sponsor of the social event. It is interesting to note that Larry's story takes place in 1908, whereas the *Chronicles of San Andreas* notes that the W.O.W. did not become established in San Andreas until 1914 although the fraternal organization was well founded elsewhere by that time. Perhaps this discrepancy merits further research.

Larry always called himself "a native in exile." Although he lived the rest of his life in San Francisco, he maintained close ties with his home towns in Calaveras County. Just two years short of his one hundredth birthday, Larry passed away in 2001.

These recollections illustrate the importance of preserving the first-hand accounts of our ancestors and pioneers. If you know of an important story in your family, please be sure to record it.

MORE HISTORY ON THE RED BARN

In 2004 the Historical Society opened the Red Barn Museum. Our October 2004 issue of *Las Calaveras* explored the history of this fascinating monument to our county's past. Since that issue, we have learned more details of the construction of the barn and the hospital grounds where the present day Government Center resides.

The **Calaveras Prospect** newspaper noted on February 3, 1917, that the Grand Jury had visited the hospital and issued this report: "... found everything in a satisfactory condition, except laundry building and we recommend that a new and well equipped laundry building be installed on the grounds, and also recommend that barn for dairy be overhauled and repaired. No complaints were made by inmates."

Please keep in mind that the "inmates" were the county indigents who had no other place to live!

This observation of the Grand Jury regarding the laundry facilities is amusing. It is widely believed that the laundry building is the only building on the Government Center grounds that remains wholly untouched by time. It has always been regarded as the only intact building, without any modification, that represents the true function to the hospital for which it was built. The laundry building does not appear to have any major modification from its inception. It seems that county officials disregarded Grand Jury recommendations then as much as they do today!

Regarding the recommendations about the dairy barn, it has always been suspected that the barn received some major improvements since it was originally built in 1870. Recently an original county document dated 1923 contracting for repairs was discovered in archived records. The document is the clerk's record for a claim for twenty-five percent of the contract price toward repairs to the Hospital Barn. The claim details significant quantities of lumber and concrete, which answers the original question about the dimensional lumber and modern concrete that we find in the barn's structure today. Moreover, the contract lists paint as an item. This claim should help to establish the date as to when the barn was painted the red color we have known for the last eighty years.

These details help to fill in the blanks in our records. No detail should be regarded as insignificant when it comes to preserving these stories accurately.

For those who haven't been fortunate enough to see the new museum, be sure to take the time to do so! Visiting the barn makes for a lovely way to spend a rainy afternoon, or any afternoon for that matter. Visiting hours are Thursdays through Sundays, 10:00 am to 4:00 pm and other hours and tours are available by arrangement. If you're interested in getting involved with the barn, such as hosting visitors, please contact the Historical Society office at **754-1058**.

A PIECE OF CALAVERAS HISTORY COMES TO PASS

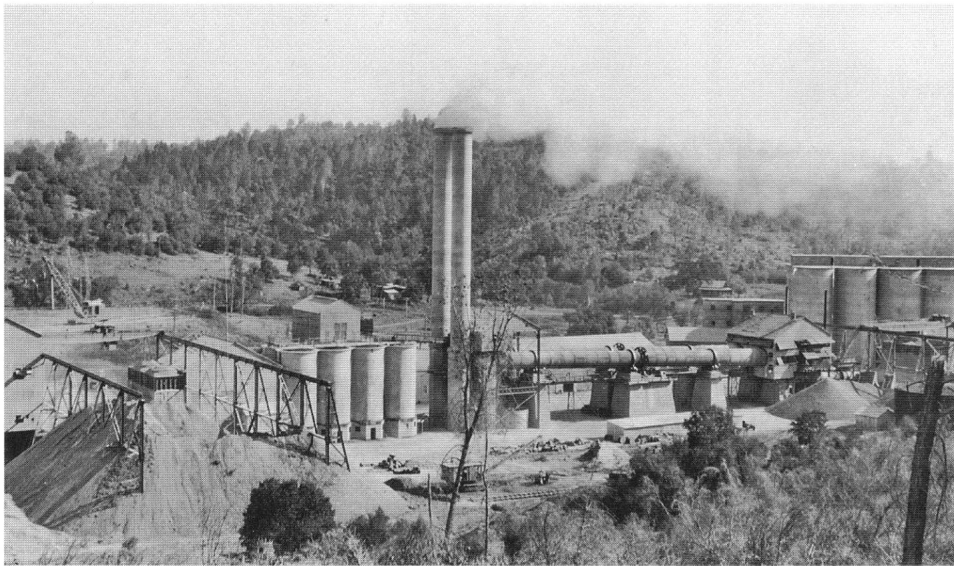
The Calaveras Cement Company has been an icon in Calaveras' rich history for eighty years. Anyone who has been in San Andreas for more than a few hours is aware of the impressive towers and grounds of the Cement Plant just two miles from Highway 49 on Pool Station Road.

Ground was broken on construction of the plant on May 1, 1925. One year later the plant was opened

with much fanfare with an open house and barbecue held on a fine Sunday afternoon on May 9, 1926. The event was attended by over 15,000 guests, more than twice the population of Calaveras County at the time. It was believed to have been the largest single event ever held in the county up to that date. The first shipment of cement left the plant the following month, followed by

years of vigorous activity. The plant is credited with supplying cement to such milestone projects as the Pardee Dam, several Bureau of Reclamation canal projects across California, and many military projects such as the airport at the Fairfield-Suisun Air Force Base.

The Calaveras Cement Company was founded by Mr. William Mein who learned, quite by coincidence, of a significant limestone



The mighty Calaveras Cement Company plant in San Andreas in full operation shortly after its construction, circa 1927. Photo from the files of the Historical Society.



The Calaveras Cement Company shortly before demolition efforts began, September 2004. Photo courtesy of Wally Motloch.

deposit in San Andreas. Late in 1922 Mr. George Poore, Sr., who shared an office with Mr. Mein in San Francisco, had to go next door to their neighbor's office to use their phone as their own phone was not operating. Through this brief encounter he learned of the Kentucky House deposit, and the gentlemen spent the next two years exploring the opportunity and forming the company. Messrs. Mein and Poore were on the original board of founders for the company which was signed in to incorporation in January of 1925 in Dover, Delaware.

George Poore worked at the Cement Plant from its inception. In the 1930's his son, George B. Poore, Jr., came to the plant as the resident manager. The junior Poore went on to play a significant role in the economic and social development of San Andreas and Calaveras County's history. George, Jr. was the driving force behind the San Andreas Grange, the San Andreas Sanitary District, our current county hospital and our County Museum. He was a charter member of the Calaveras County Historical Society and served as the society's president from 1965 to 1967 (see *Las Calaveras*, April 2001 and October 2002).

In 1959 the Cement Plant was acquired by Flintkote, and in 1979 it was sold again to Genstar. By 1982 it became evident that the equipment had become obsolete and needed to be entirely modernized to continue to compete in the market, so they decided to build a whole

***Everyone who
builds a factory
builds a temple.***

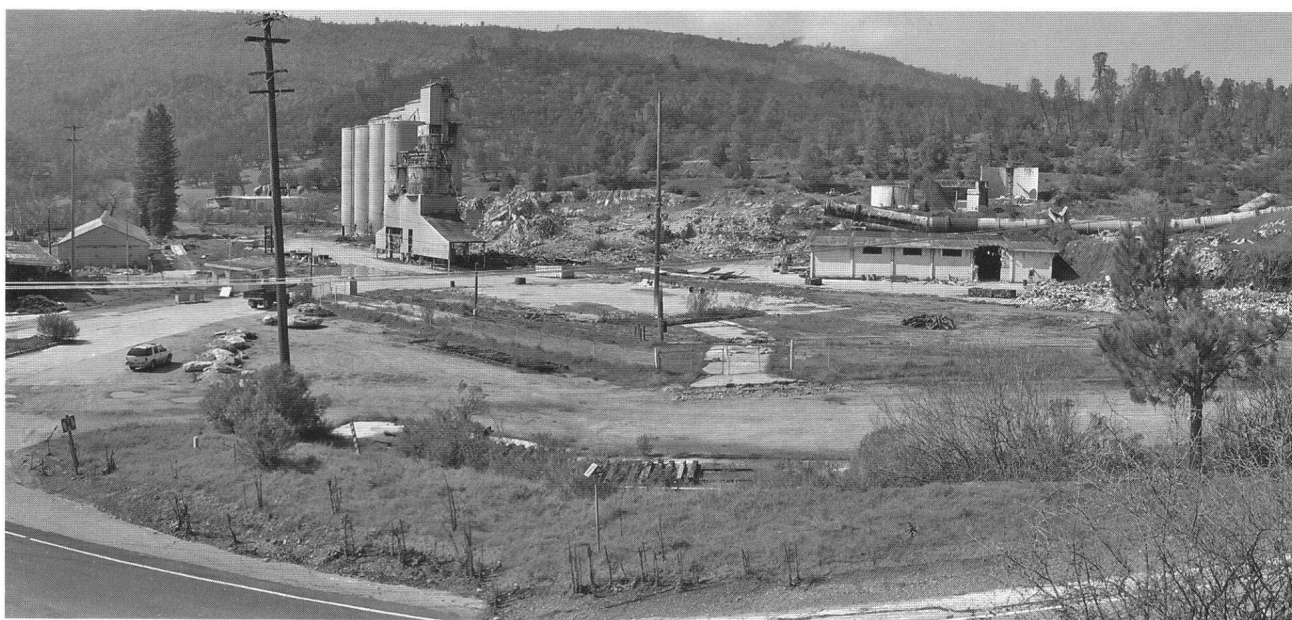
—Calvin Coolidge

new plant. After careful economic analysis, it was decided to not build the new plant at the Calaveras location. Instead, it was determined that it was more feasible to build it in southern California and a new plant was built in Tehachapi.

The Calaveras Cement Plant officially closed its San Andreas operation down in 1983. Since that time the plant has stood vacant. Salvage operations began almost immediately, and the owners explored alternative uses for the facilities but none ever proved viable.

Last month if you thought you heard the rumble of the mighty plant coming to life again, sadly you were mistaken. That rumble was the sound of explosives bringing the remaining buildings of the plant down.

The mighty Calaveras Cement Company and its monumental plant played a significant role in Calaveras County's economy and landscape for many decades. It weathered economic swings such as the Depression, wars, and building booms. A captivating talk about the plant was presented by longtime employees Bill Fuller and Ted Allured to the Historical Society at the January meeting. The story of the Calaveras Cement Company is fascinating in itself and *Las Calaveras* will attempt to explore more of the legend in a future issue. We should never forget those giants that built Calaveras County.



The changing landscape—demolition of the cement plant, March 2005. Photo courtesy of Wally Motloch.

Calaveras County Historical Society

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Las Calaveras is published quarterly by the Calaveras County Historical Society. A subscription to *Las Calaveras* comes with membership in the Calaveras County Historical Society for \$22.00 per year. Non-members may obtain copies from the Historical Society office. The original historical material presented in *Las Calaveras* is not copyrighted and anyone is invited to use it. Mention of the source would be appreciated. Contributions of articles about Calaveras County are appreciated and may be submitted to the Historical Society for consideration.

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.

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 museum 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.

Donations

The Historical Society is grateful for the following donations:

November 2004

House plant for museum—Roark & Elizabeth Weber, San Andreas

Black quartz and gold shirt stud, gold barrette, gold pin and two photos—Amy Jordan, Greenbrae

Wool lap robe with a dog design—Robert Norman, West Point

Nine picture postcards—Mary Beth Shideler—Lafayette

Forest Service posters, LP record and set of books—Mr. & Mrs. Robert Cooper, Lafayette

New Members

The Historical Society welcomes the following new members:

November 2004

Harvey Williams, Stockton
Robert & Carol Ward, San Andreas
Patricia Noll, Glencoe
Abe Bradt, Sheep Ranch
Deneane Ashcraft, Cottonwood
Michelle Bellinger, San Andreas
Dan & Carol Lagomarsino, Murphys
Robert & Dorothy Buchanan, Murphys
Vickie Phillips, Mountain Ranch
Neona Shipp, San Andreas
Robert Garland, Burson
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December 2004

George Freed, Lodi
Janet Stewart, Murphys
Ken Rose, San Andreas

January 2005

Carol Ann McDaniel, Valley Springs
Raymond Walker, Angels Camp
Daniel Gibson, Murphys
Douglas & Catherine Mewhinney, San Andreas

December 2004

Photo of M.J. Brickley—Barbara Kathan, San Andreas
1978 500-gallon Moke Hill fire truck—John Valentine, Newport Beach

January 2005

Gold nuggets—Mary Alice Wooley, Los Angeles
Furniture and household items—Kenneth & Carin Cuslidge, Stockton
Transcripts of gold rush letters from 1851—Ernestine Ransom, Arcadia