



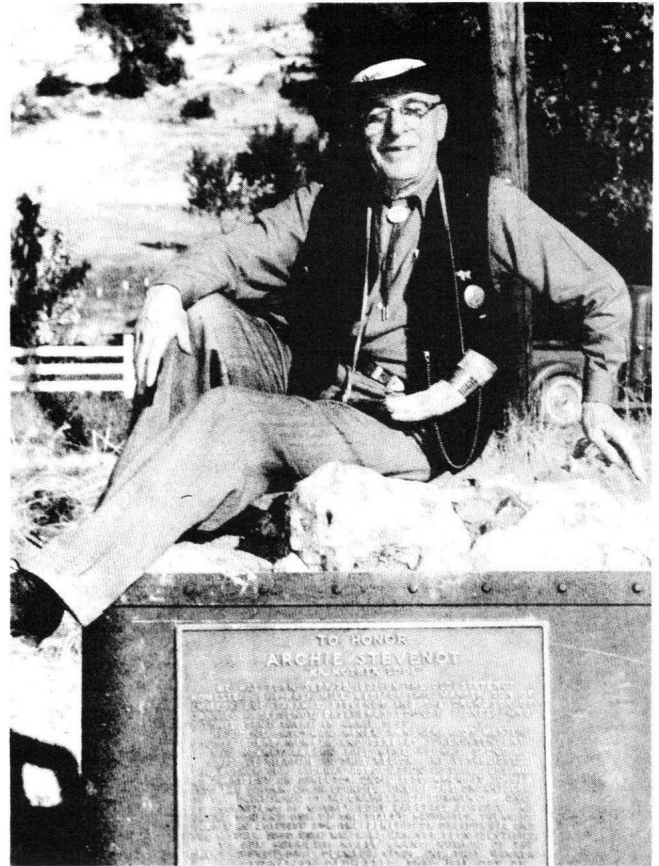
Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society
Volume XXXIII April, 1985 Number 3

CARSON HILL, MELONES AND THE STEVENOTS

Carson Hill, Melones, and Stevenot — these names are once again in the news, as E Clampus Vitus prepares to replace the stolen plaque and rededicate the Archie D. Stevenot Bridge. Clamper Earl Schmidt has presented us with a draft of the historical statement he will be making at ECV's Murphys meeting on May 26th. We are pleased to print this interesting review of Archie and the Stevenot family.

In the always fascinating story of Melones, another milestone has occurred with the publication of Milo Bird's "Melones Memories." We wonder how many of the tourists crossing the magnificent Stevenot Bridge have any idea of the complex history of this community which lies below the placid surface of New Melones Reservoir, well summarized recently by Julia Costello in "Melones, A Story of a Stanislaus River Town." Reading Milo Bird's memories of life in this community three-quarters of a century ago reminded us of a short Bird manuscript in our files concerning one of the prospectors of Melones. These solitary miners, often prodigious workers, were once a part of every mining camp. Bird's story of Charlie Allen does much to preserve our memory of the almost forgotten lone prospector.

Another recent addition to the documentation of the Melones story is a donation by Lloyd H. Haigh to the Society. A quarter of a century ago a Sonora photographer, Louis Jensen, entrusted his collection of nearly 10,000 negatives of Mother Lode scenes to his friend, Mr. Haigh. These photographs had been taken mostly during the 1920's, 30's, and early 40's. Mr. Haigh was instructed to donate these negatives to the appropriate depositories when he felt the time was right. Consequently, we were very pleased to have some 300 of the negatives placed in the archives of the Society. The majority of these pictures are concerned with Big Trees which was a favorite subject of Mr. Jensen's. The others are mostly of the Melones vicinity, with a few scattered



MR. MOTHER LODGE

Archie himself on the mine car marker at Carson Hill.

Courtesy of Kenneth Castro

views throughout the county. The illustrations in this issue are from the Jensen collection unless otherwise identified.

Editor

THEY CALLED HIM "MISTER MOTHER LODGE"

by Earl F. Schmidt

Archibald D. Stevenot, born at Carson Hill on September 25, 1882, was recognized throughout the Mother Lode and California as one of Calaveras County's most illustrious sons. In 1961, his lifetime interest and efforts on behalf of the Gold Country brought him the formal and official recognition as "Mister Mother Lode" by a joint resolution of the California legislature. However, he always wore his many laurels with ease and good humor and throughout his eighty-six years preferred no other name than "Archie."



CARSON HILL SCHOOL

In 1882 Emile Stevenot established a school at Carson Hill. It was taken over by the County in the following year. Emile took this picture shortly after the school began, with five of his children, and others of the Peirano, Tarbat, and Cordes families. Fred Stevenot is third from the left.

Society Files

The son and grandson of California pioneers, Archie attended school at Carson Hill and then in Sonora. He was one of the first students at Lick-Wilmerding Institute in San Francisco, and graduated from St. Ignatius College in the city. On his return to the Mother Lode, he became a traveling salesman, selling candles — a most important item to early miners as well as to householders — from his horse-drawn wagon. His territory extended from Fresno Flats and Mariposa to Sierra City. He experienced all the problems of that day first-hand when the vicissitudes of weather, road, and river conditions required one to use zigzag routes. For example, starting at Mariposa, he would go to La Grange, then up to Sonora and Columbia. Then, if the Stanislaus River was high, he would drop down to Knights Ferry, and back up to Copperopolis and Angels. Then back down toward Stockton, just to get over to Jackson. At that time, all the principal roads connected the Mother Lode communities to either Stockton, Sacramento or Marysville. This experience gave Archie full motivation for his lifelong efforts in the promotion of California's famed Golden Chain

Highway "49", subsequently developed to link all the central Mother Lode mines and communities with the southernmost ones in Madera and Mariposa and the northernmost ones of Nevada and Sierra counties.

News articles at the time of Archie's death in 1968 tell of his early roles as a farmer, dairyman, ox-team driver, postmaster, and school board member. In 1915 he became foreman of the Carson Hill mine and then superintendent. He was resident manager for the combined operations of the Carson Hill and Melones companies, consolidated by W.J. Loring in 1918.

In 1919, with a group of other mine operators and businessmen, he led in the founding of the "Mother Lode Highway Association" (later renamed, in 1950, "The Golden Chain Council of the Mother Lode"). He served for many years as president and was the chief promoter and lobbyist for the organization. The record shows that he never missed a meeting in over forty-seven years. He retired as "President Emeritus" in 1967.

When the fortunes of the Carson Hill Gold Mines, Inc.

fell to a low ebb in 1924, the Loring management was forced out by a group of controlling stockholders. At that time Archie moved to Merced where he managed the El Capitan and later the Tioga hotels for some sixteen years. Actually, the Carson Hill mine had one of its most successful periods of operation when Archie was superintendent, working under the direction of Charles H. Segerstrom, Sonora banker, and W.J. Loring, a very capable mining engineer and one-time associate of Herbert Hoover. The U.S. Bureau of Mines reported that the Loring operations from 1919 to 1926 produced about seven million dollars from some one million tons of ore. At the prevailing price of gold of \$20.67, this amounted to about 340,000 ounces. At today's price, this is equivalent to well over \$100,000,000! The average grade of the ore of 0.34 ounces per ton was unusually good for a Mother Lode gold-mining operation. Apparent exhaustion of the higher-grade ore bodies forced the closure of the mine in 1926, later reopened as a low-grade operation.

Archie was a co-founder of the California State Chamber of Commerce. He was active in the revival of E Clampus Vitus in 1931, and served in 1961 as the 5th Sublime Noble Grand Humbug. The plaque that was placed that year on the ore cart monument on Highway "49" at Carson Hill states quite accurately, "...there is hardly an activity for the benefit of California and the Mother Lode with which he has not been identified."

The State legislature, at the time of Archie's death, directed that the New Melones Bridge, then being designed, be designated and marked as the "Archie D. Stevenot Memorial Bridge." An appropriate marker was placed at the Highway "49" bridge overlook in 1976. This marker, which was stolen shortly after the original dedication, has been remade and is being installed by E Clampus Vitus with ceremonies to be conducted on the occasion of its 1985 Grand Council meeting at Murphys on May 26th.

The Stevenot name has been continuously linked with Carson Hill and the Mother Lode from the arrival of Archie's grandfather, Gabriel K. Stevenot, on Carson Creek in 1850. A native of Alsace, attorney and judge there, Gabriel came to America in 1846 and then around the Horn in 1849. He worked near Marysville for John Sutter before coming to Calaveras County. Establishing a tent-store on the Creek, he began buying up claims and property from Albany Flat to Robinsons Ferry. He built the first stamp mill (four stamps) in the vicinity, at the Carson Creek waterfall. He and his son Emile were involved with other stamp mills at Carson Hill in subsequent years.

Emile K. Stevenot, Archie's father, remained in France to complete his education at the University of Strassburg in chemistry, mining, and languages. He joined his father at Carson Hill about 1863, and subsequently became president of the Melones & Stanislaus Mining Company, hold-



CARSON HILL TOWN

This is how it looked from well up on the hill.

ing this post until 1870. Emile then applied his metallurgical training to the establishment of one of the early borax refineries in the country, Pacific Borax Company, at San Francisco. This refinery operated on material from his deposit and sorting plant at Columbus Marsh, in Nevada, and he was known, according to family tradition, as the first "Borax King". One of his employees, a young man by the name of Francis M. Smith, hired in San Francisco in early 1872 as a woodcutter for the Columbus operation, spent more time prospecting than cutting wood. Smith discovered the rich borate deposits at Teel's Marsh and within a year had set up a competing operation to Pacific Borax. In 1879 he had become so successful that he bought out Stevenot's entire operations, and then went on to become known as "Borax Smith."

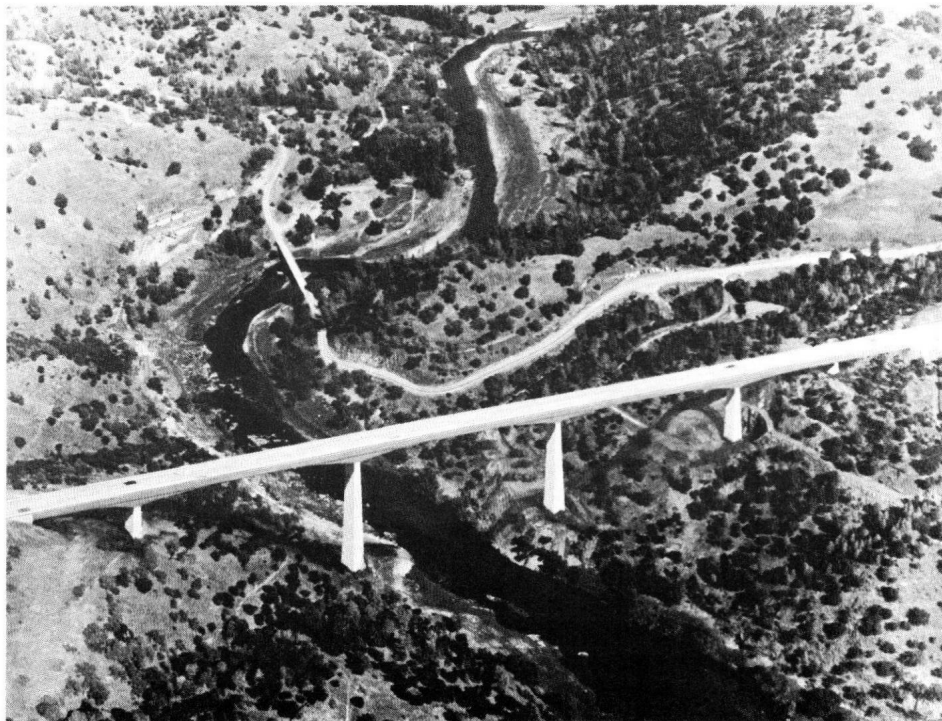
Emile married Sarah Stephens in San Francisco in 1872. They had nine children. After returning to Carson Hill in 1879, Emile became heavily involved in the development of improved gold recovery processes and in milling operations. This included the retreatment of mill tailings from other operations. Both Gabriel and Emile had dealings with many prominent mining people of the day, and Emile continued in these relationships after his father's death in 1885. Among these personalities were Jim Fair, William Ralston, one of the Vanderbilts, Grayson and Boland, William and James Irvine, Charles Segerstrom, and William J. Loring.

Fred Stevenot, Archie's oldest brother, played a highly

significant role in West Coast business development, serving as president, or as a board member, of major lumber, pulp, transit, mineral, and utility firms. He was a senior vice president of the Bank of America, a regent of St. Mary's College, a State assemblyman, a State railroad commissioner, and the first director of the California Department of Natural Resources. In later years he was instrumental in restoring much of the Carson Hill mining ownership to the Stevenot family.

Younger brother Joseph E. Stevenot pioneered in the development of electrical power and communication utilities in the Philippines, and is credited with the organization of the Philippine Air National Guard in 1917. That same year as a major in the U.S. Army, he was the first to land an airplane in Calaveras County, at Altaville. During World War II he served as a colonel on General MacArthur's staff from Corrigedor until his death in 1943 in New Guinea. In 1938 he had helped organize the Boy Scouts of the Philippines and was their first president.

Although Archie himself had no descendants, other members of the Stevenot family continue to live in Calaveras County. Cornelia Barden Stevenot, his nephew Ed's wife, and her son Barden carry on the Stevenot traditions here. The Stevenot Winery at Murphys is achieving recognition under Barden's direction. He is also planning to reopen the Carson Hill mine, with the help of outside capital.



THE NEW BRIDGE

This "retouch" by Caltrans, in January, 1974, shows how the bridge would appear when completed. It reminds us graphically of the positions of the old highway, the town of Melones, and the Stanislaus Canyon, relative to the new bridge.

Calaveras County Museum

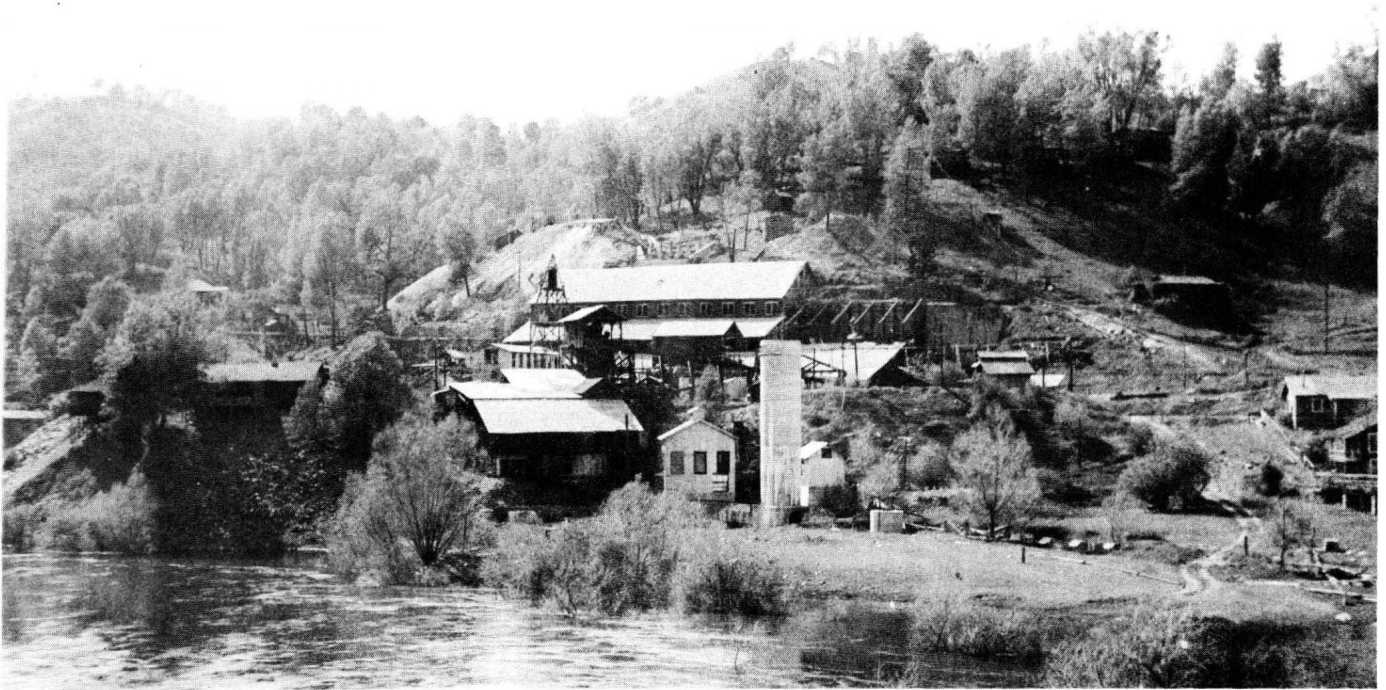
CARSON HILL GOLD ORE

Lawrence Monte Verda and Charles Segerstrom reopened the mine in 1933, later selling it to Anglo-American Corporation. Here, Monte Verda displays some high-grade ore to photographer Jensen, shortly after the reopening, at the office in Melones.



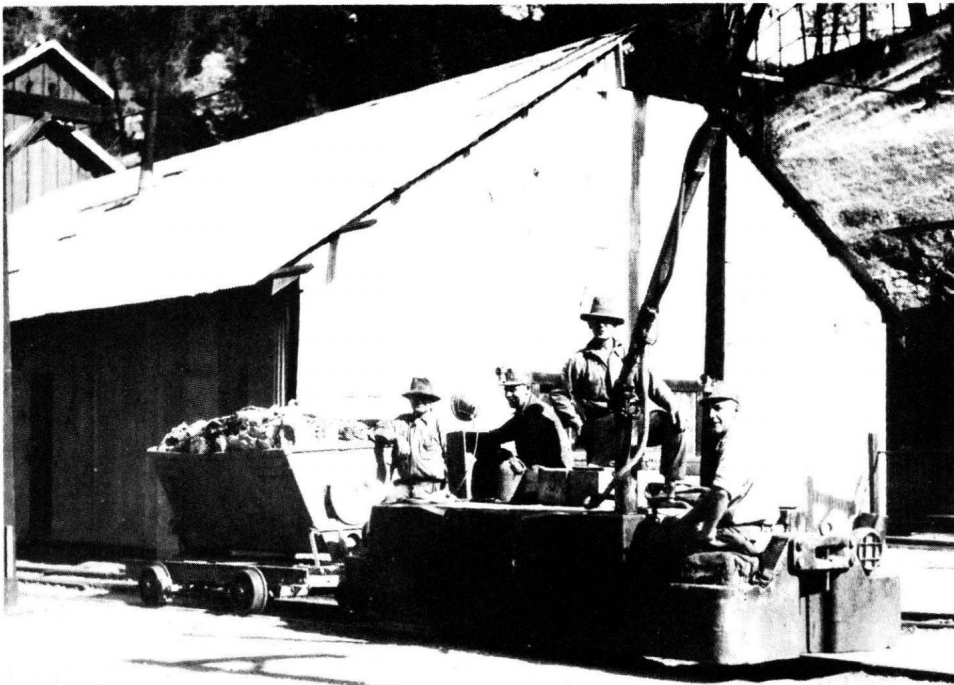
THE MELONES TUNNEL

A tunnel (adit) over 4000 feet long was driven in 1898 — 1900 by the Melones Mining Company, under their Carson Hill properties. The tunnel later became the main adit for the consolidated workings of all the Carson Hill mines.



THE OLD MELONES MILL

The Melones Mining company built this 120-stamp mill at the turn of the century. In later years it was partly dismantled and revamped as a tailings treatment and cyanide plant to handle the tailings from the new mill which had been built under W.J. Loring's management just below the town.

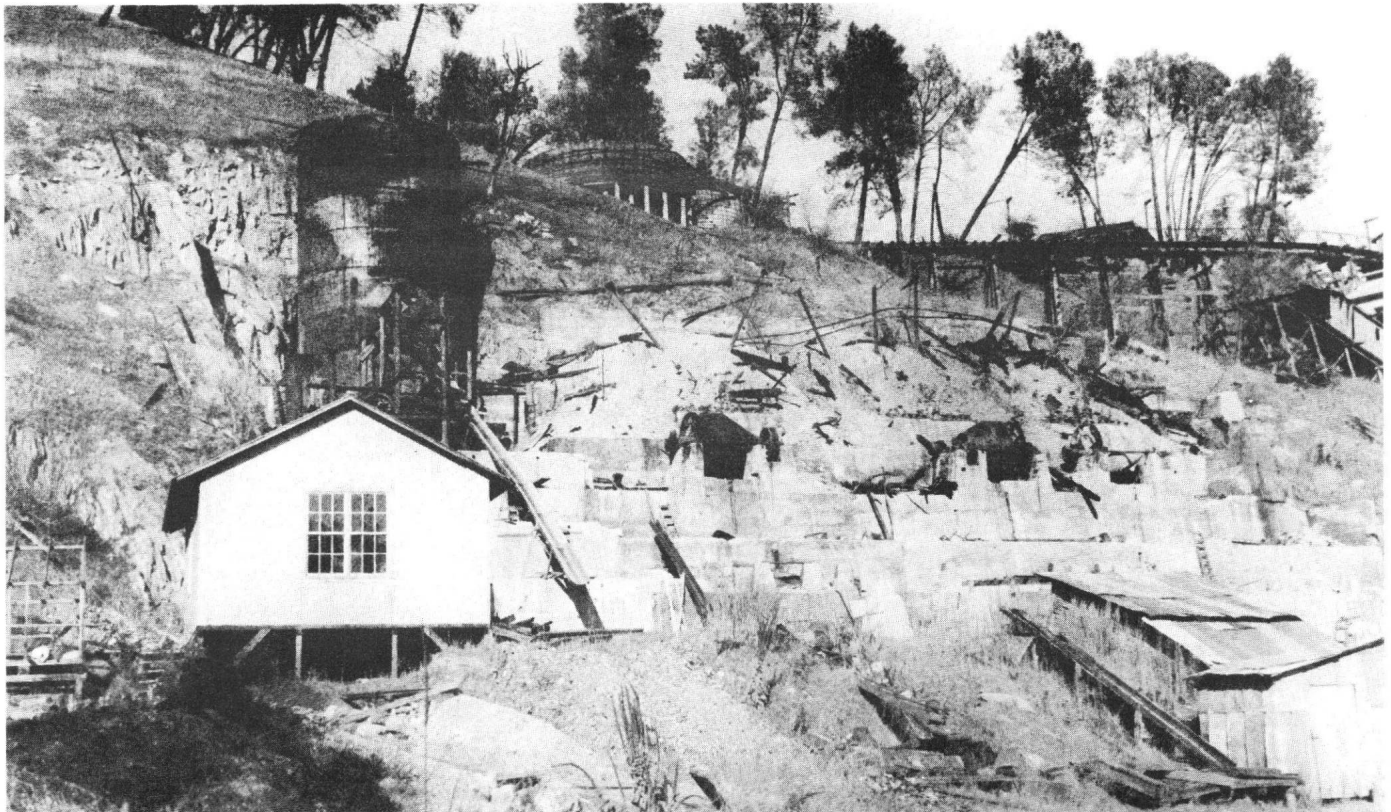
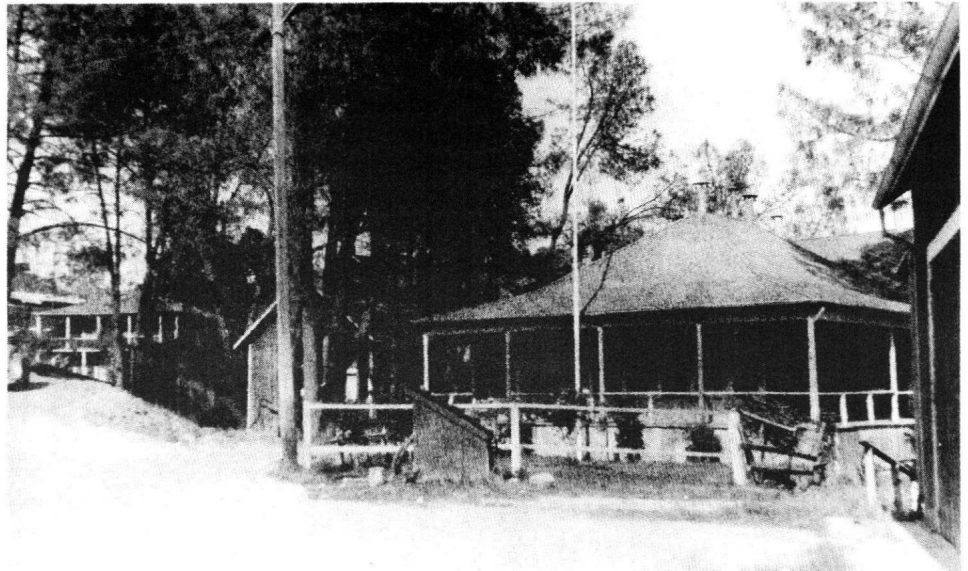


THE ELECTRIC TRAM

A powerful electric "motor" was needed to tram men and supplies into the workings and to haul ore out to the mill.

THE MINE OFFICE

In 1933, when this picture was taken, it was occupied by the staff of the Carson Hill Gold Mines Corporation. The company owned many of the buildings in town.



THE FINAL BLOW

A disastrous fire in 1942 destroyed the mill at Melones. That, and U.S. Order L-208, permanently closed the big underground mine. Then, in the late 1970's, the waters of the New Melones Reservoir closed over the site of the once extensive surface plant and mill buildings of the Carson Hill-Melones mine and the little town called Melones.

CHARLIE ALLEN'S GOPHER HOLE

by Milo Bird

Charlie Allen was five feet, eight inches tall, weighed 165 pounds, had brilliant hazel eyes, and wavy, sandy hair. His fingers resembled the gnarly roots of a stunted Bonzai pine tree. He had a wonderful smile and his teeth would have been worth millions of dollars in advertising value to any toothpaste manufacturer. His speech amused me for he invariably misused verb forms. He would say, "I seen the fire across the river after it had ran up to the railway tracks."

In contrast with other prospectors around town, Charlie never talked about his prospect hole, and for a good reason as I later learned when I accidentally found it.

For several years before I made that discovery a number of things about Charlie had puzzled me. He did not have symptoms of silicosis so characteristic of hard-rock miners in our district. He was neither as sallow as prospectors who worked continually underground nor was he as tanned as the men who panned for gold along the river. The toes of his shoes were always badly worn while the soles and heels remained in excellent condition. And furthermore, he never had any drill steel sharpened at the local blacksmith shop. Yet, every Saturday evening he came into town from down river and sold a small vial of gold to the local grocer.

Although Charlie always came up river, indicating a prospect down that way, the gold was not float but was from freshly crushed quartz. This could not be because there weren't any gold-bearing quartz outcroppings known down that way.

After Charlie sold his gold to the grocer, he always bought

enough groceries to last another week. These he dumped into a gunny sack which he tied to a limb of a fig tree behind the store. Then with a few dollars jingling merrily in his old pants pockets, he would head for Baldy's Bar and begin his weekly Bacchanalian spree. And every Sunday morning, winter and summer, we could find him asleep on a bench in the woodshed behind the saloon where he had been dumped when the bar closed at 2 a.m.

Sometime during the day, he would awaken, wash, finger-comb his hair, spit-polish his scuffed shoes, get a meal or two at Ben Nam's restaurant and then sit on one of the convenient benches along Main Street chatting with whoever was willing to stop and talk. It was during such moments that I became so well acquainted with him. But in spite of our friendship I could never compel myself to ask questions about his background. The nearest I ever came to learning where he originated was once when he said, "When I was a kid back in Richmond--." He then cut himself off so short I thought it best not to pursue the subject.

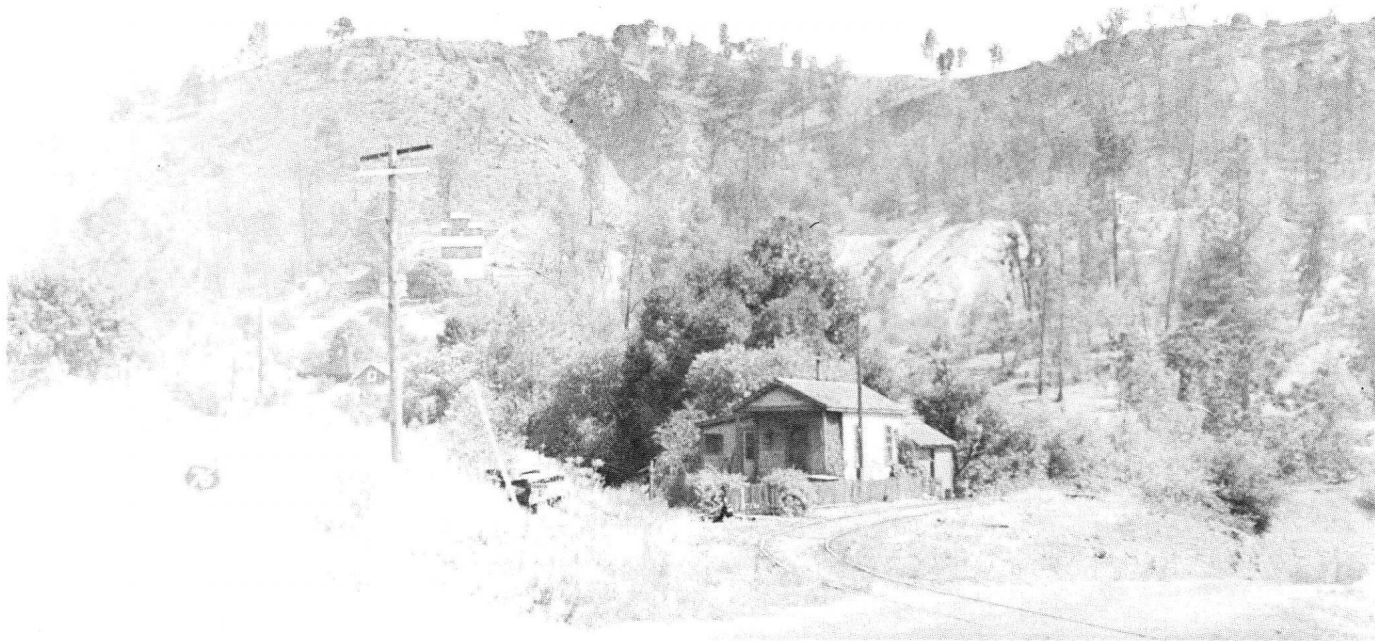
After Charlie ate his Sunday evening meal at Ben Nam's restaurant he would lounge around the saloons, take a drink or two with his friends and then some time during the night he and his sack of groceries would disappear, not to be seen again until the next Saturday evening. But one Sunday night he didn't quite make it out of town. After picking up his bag of groceries he started down river but fell over a bank and broke his hip.

If Charlie had listened to his doctor this story would have had a different ending. But he didn't. Every time the nurse left him alone he would undo the bandages to relieve the traction on his broken hip. Consequently, his hip didn't heal properly and was too stiff for him to continue prospecting. He did manage, though, to get a job clerking in the local grocery store.



MELONES

*A view of the town from high
on the Tuolumne side.*



RAILROAD DEPOT

The Sierra Railway passed through Carson Hill on its way up to Angels Camp.

Some years later I opened a commercial assay office in Angels Camp. Soon, prospectors from all over the county wrote in asking me to sample their prospects. One of them told me he was on the east side of Carson Hill and I could find him there every day.

At my first opportunity I drove out to Carson Hill and began to look for signs of prospect activity. Since I didn't find my man on the south side of Melones Mining Company Property I was crossing over to the north side when I found a pile of nice looking quartz rock beneath a huge manzanita. Upon looking around I found several more piles of quartz well hidden in patches of chaparral. Under another bush I found a hole about three feet in diameter dug into an outcropping of quartz.

Believing I had found my prospector, I got a flashlight from my car and crawled into the hole. At the end, many feet back inside the hill, I came to four tools, a single-jack, a clawbar and two long chisels. On the handle of the single-jack were the initials "C.A."

Now I knew where Charlie Allen had been getting his gold. Some time later, when I told him I had accidentally found his prospect, he flashed that million-dollar smile and said, "Yeah, I knowed it wasn't legal for me to prospect on

that property but I knowed the company had gave up on that outcropping years ago."

Charlie had dug every foot of that hole with a single jack, his chisels and the carpenter's prybar. He hadn't dared to use dynamite because a single blast would have alerted the mining company to his presence on their property. He had dragged all the rock out of the hole in gunny sacks, had hidden it in various clumps of chaparral, and had carried the best of it by a circuitous route down-river to where he kept a mortar and pestle hidden in a clump of willows. There he had pulverized it and had panned out the gold.

Since he had done no drilling he had not contracted silicosis. He had been out of his prospect hole long enough each day to keep from becoming pallid but not long enough to get tanned. Crawling in and out of his hole had worn out the toes of his shoes but not the soles and heels. And since he had never drilled any blasting holes he needed no drill steel sharpened. Thus all the things about Charlie which had puzzled me were not so puzzling after all, except for one. How had he dug that hole through quartz rock with such simple tools?

Charlie explained that he had followed a high-grade stringer through a vein so badly broken he had been able

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The Calaveras County Historical Society, a non-profit corporation, meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at the Grange Hall in San Andreas - except for dinner meetings which are held each quarter at different places in the county.

The Society's office is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30 to 5:00. The telephone number is (209) 754-1058. Visitors are welcome.

to tunnel mostly with a prybar. He used the hammer and chisels only when he had to break off sharp points.

When I asked Charlie how he happened to find the vein in the first place, he explained that after the mining company had failed to find gold when they sunk an exploratory hole in that vein in the old South Carolina tunnel he had wondered if they shouldn't also have gone up on it. And knowing where the outcrop was on the hill above the tunnel he investigated it. As far as he was concerned, it proved to be a worth while investigation.

MELONES BOOKS

"Melones Memories", by Milo Bird, published by the Tuolumne County Historical Society, may be purchased at the Society office for \$12.00.

We still have a few copies of "Melones, A Story of a Stanislaus River Town", by Julia Costello. There is no charge for this Bureau of Reclamation publication.

IN MEMORIAM

Louis Deveglio
Col. Roy D. Wathen

December 21, 1984
February 5, 1985

