

HISTORICAL BULLETIN

Number 4

July, 1953

Volume 1

CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY San Andreas, California

Judge J. A. Smith, PresidentSan Andreas
Coke Wood, Vice-PresidentMurphys
George Poore, 2nd Vice-President Mountain Ranch
Sadie Hunt, Secretary Valley Springs
Ella Thompson, TreasurerSan Andreas
Board of Directors: Archie Stevenot, Sonora; Amon
Tanner, Murphys; Frances Lombardi, Mokelumne Hill;
John Squellati, San Andreas; James Valente, Angels Camp.

Editor of Bulletin, Coke WoodMurphys

EDITORIAL

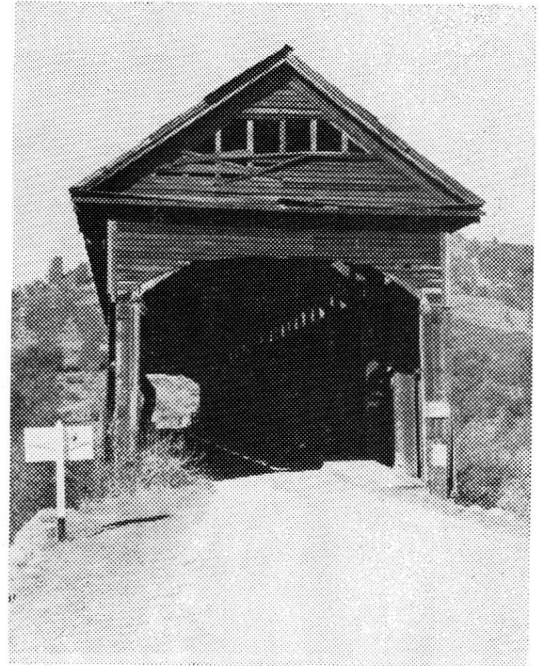
The current issue of the Bulletin marks the fourth publication of the Calaveras County Historical Society. In these four issues we have made a worthwhile beginning in the recording and preserving of the early history of Calaveras County. We have also published rare old pictures that will soon be impossible to obtain. These four issues are greatly cherished by our members, I'm sure. As we continue to publish the history of many phases of the County, the complete file of the Bulletin will be a record of value and pleasure to all our members.

May we urge all members to continue to invite those showing interest in our work to join the Society. Several people have stated they did not know membership was open to everyone but thought a person must be invited to join and be sponsored by a member. Don't hesitate to invite people to join!

Many of us who joined with the first organization meeting in July, should remember that our annual dues of \$4.00 are now payable. Let's pay up before the Secretary has to send us a notice.

We welcome our good friend and enthusiastic member, Archie Stevenot, to his new position as director of the Society, and congratulate him on his recent marriage. Archie has contributed much to the meetings with his funny stories in Italian dialect. He has been largely responsible also for the support given by the Tuolumne Board of Supervisors, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Grand Parlors of the Native Daughters and Native Sons to our project of saving the O'Brynes Ferry Bridge.

Walter Colton of Monterey visited the Stanislaus Mine in 1848 and wrote: "It was in the Stanislaus that the largest lump of pure gold ever found in California was discovered. It weighed 231 pounds, and was nearly pure and cubic in form.



THE COVERED BRIDGE AT O'BRYNES FERRY

By MRS. WILLARD FRIER
Shady Lane, Ross, Calif.

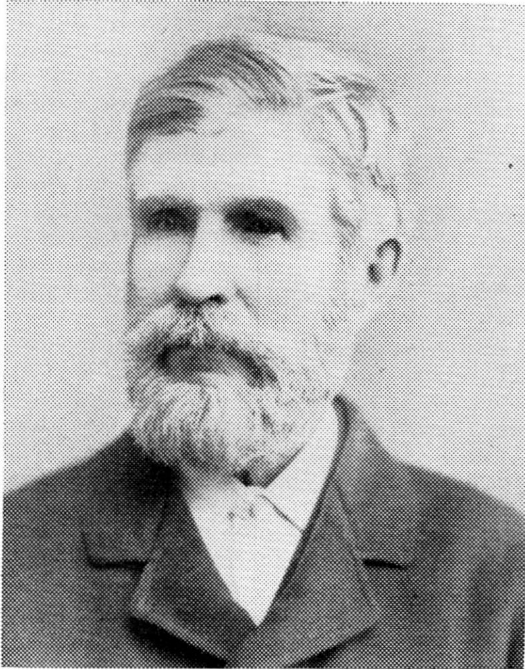
The covered bridge at O'Brynes Ferry was built by my great-grandfather, Rehindhart Rupli. It was built in New York and shipped around the Horn in sections. The bridge was to be a toll bridge from which my great-grandfather hoped to make a fortune. Before the bridge was completed the mines failed and the bridge which cost \$50,000 was sold to the State for \$5,000.

The foundations which still remain by the bridge were the foundations of the Rupli home.

My grandmother, Adaline Rupli, who married Bernard Harter, a driver of a team through the Mother Lode country, was the first white child to be born in the town of Shaw's Flat in the year 1852. When she grew up she taught school in the little white school house which I believe still stands in Shaw's Flat.

Although I was a very small child when my grandmother passed away, I can still remember the stories of her youth spent at O'Brynes Ferry. One story which is outstanding in my mind is about the time that Bascus Vasquez and his gang of outlaws stopped at the Rupli home and forced my great-grandmother to cook dinner for them and to feed their horses. The Rupli children were hidden in old mining holes safely until the bandits left.

I hope that there is some way in which the bridge can be saved as it is certainly a monument to the old days of California.



ALEXANDER REID WHEAT

By MRS. IDA M. WIMER,

Granddaughter of Mr. and Mrs. A. R. Wheat.

Mr. Alexander Reid Wheat was born on the 2nd day of July, 1815, near Columbia, Adair County, Kentucky. The early part of his boy-hood days were spent in that State. Later, with his folks, he moved to Illinois and there spent a short period of time but returned to Kentucky in 1830. When he was 15 years of age, with the desire of completing his education, he entered an Academy near the town of his birth and graduated from there three years later. He then returned to Illinois once more and followed school teaching.

In 1837 he went to Iowa and engaged in farming and on the 24th day of October of that same year he was married to Miss Martha Jane Campbell, to which union three sons and one daughter were born.

Early in 1849, Mr. Wheat, with a party of gold-seekers, came to California by crossing the Plains. Arriving here, they located for the winter and built log cabins about 300 yards west of the bridge where the Stockton road crosses the North Fork of the Calaveras River. The party consisted of (beside Mr. Wheat) Joe Wheat, Al and Thomas Nash, D. Miller, George and Joe Rasman, N. Murphy, Jim Baser, and Christ Meyers. This little colony of miners was known as the "Iowa Log Cabin" and here the first mining meeting in the County was held. Rules and mining laws for the District were framed and by Christmas, 1849, a camp of 150 miners had settled here.

In the year 1850, Mr. Wheat went back to Iowa and while there was elected to the office of Sheriff for a two-

year term in Lee County, Iowa. In 1853, he came back to California, again crossing the Plains, and bringing his family with him. After arriving here, he settled at what was then called the "Buckskin Ranch" near North Branch, now the Ellingwood home. After a short time spent there he moved to Double Springs and rented the property. After two years at this place, Mr. Wheat concluded he would make another trip to the scene of his childhood, so in company with his family and Mrs. Wheat's brother, John Campbell, they started. When they reached San Francisco, they were robbed of \$7,000 in cash which he carried in a leather bag on his arm. To distract attention, he picked up his little daughter and sat her on top of the money bags. They then boarded the boat and retired to their state room. Mr. Wheat then placed the money in Mrs. Wheat's care and she placed the money bags under the pillow of their bunk. She then took a stool and sat in the doorway of their state room thinking no one could pass without her knowledge. When Mr. Wheat returned and went to get the money, it was gone. It was always supposed the money was taken from under the pillow through a little window at the head of the bunk, although the window was not easily reached from the outside of the boat. It was always a mystery how the bags could have been reached without her hearing a noise. Mr. and Mrs. Wheat were given back their money for their fare and returned to Double Springs. The brother, John Campbell, was the only one to continue the trip.

Mr. Wheat bought back one of the span of horses he had sold and peddled vegetables and groceries from Stockton to the mountain towns and in 1856 he purchased the Double Springs ranch. In 1858 he rented the Hawkeye Place and there ran a hotel and store for about two years. Not being satisfied away from Double Springs, he again returned and engaged in farming and stock raising. He lived in what was formally the first Courthouse of Calaveras County until 1860, when he built the two and a half story stone house through which seven generations have passed.

In the year 1877, he was elected to the Assembly and again in 1884. He was County Surveyor for eight years and Deputy United State Surveyor of Mineral Lands.

On October 24, 1900, Mr. and Mrs. Wheat celebrated their 63rd wedding anniversary.

Mr. Wheat passed away on July 9, 1901, at the age of 86 years.

Mrs. Wheat passed away on May 3, 1909, at the age of 85 years.

INDIAN HISTORY OF CALAVERAS

By GEORGE POORE, JR.

Let us consider the Indians that have lived in Calaveras County, or rather the foothills of the Sierra Nevadas as the Indians knew not of counties, nor the Johnny Tecumseh's or Yellow Jackets, or Manuellas, those Indians under the influence of the white invaders and friends of our parents, but those Indians unspoiled by white influences, good or bad that occupied a land of food and sunshine.

When did the first Indians reach this area and whence

did they come? This is a question asked by many and the answer is found only in the remains of kitchen middens and the burials frequently discovered during modern excavation.

The antiquity of the Indian in the foothill country is very old. Remains of great age, estimated by some authorities as probably twenty thousand years, have been discovered from time to time in the cave burials found in the great limestone deposits of the foothills. Notable among these are the remains buried deep in the lime deposits of Moaning Cave of Vallecito. Bones have been found in the caves of Cave City, near Mountain Ranch. Also during the mining of limestone at the Calaveras Cement Company quarry at Old Gulch, near Calaveritas, bones of great age have been recovered at considerable depth. These were sent to the University of California. They were associated with bones of animals long since extinct.

A continuous history from that time to this is not, however, found. The last tribes to occupy the area are known as the Miwok. Between them and those early cave burials there is a void impossible to fill.

It is believed that all North and South American Indians migrated from Asia via Alaska, spreading in great waves that did not stop until the southernmost tip of South America was reached. These invasions came over long intervals of time and the migratory waves more or less retained their individuality. It is not possible to determine who our first Asiatic invaders were or like, let it suffice that they came many years ago.

Among one of the later invasions were our Miwok, one of the Penutian stock found in California. They probably arrived not too many years ago, a thousand or two, little difference, considering the age of the world.

There were six divisions of the Miwok tribe; Marin County, Clear Lake, the Deltas of the Central Valley and the three groups of the Sierra foothills. Calaveras County is only interested in the Central Miwoks of the foothills. It was in this area they lived. In fact, from the foothill edge in the valley, to an elevation of 4,000 feet their camps are found wherever good water abounded. Nearly every spring has its camp site, and in every creek the bed rock is pocked with their mortars. Above 4,000 feet summer excursions may have taken occasional parties high in the Sierras. However, the large camps at great altitudes were probably those of Washoe and Mono parties crossing the divide to barter with their friends, the Miwoks.

Before the coming of the white man, the Miwok lived a simple life, gathering nuts, seeds, bulbs, and hunting. Life was not too difficult. They did not come under the influences of the higher culture found to the North among the Klamath Indians nor the yet more advanced life of the Southwest. In fact they stagnated.

Their dress was simple. It did not exist under ten years of age. The women wore a simple grass skirt or one of hides. It did not reach the knees. The men wore a simple breech clout, if any. This was also worn by women under the dress. In cold weather robes of animal hides or blankets made from strips of rabbit hide were added as protection against the cold.

Implements were many, if simple. The art of basket making had not been as highly developed as in other parts of California. They did not compare with that of their neighbors. However, baskets were used in cooking as well as for containers. Both the twined and coiled basket types were made.

Tools of wood were used, such as paddles for cooking, digging sticks, sticks for handling the hot stones used in cooking. Also tobacco pipes were made of wood. Bows and arrows and a short spear were common.

Stone tools were numerous. Arrow points were well-shaped and knife blades of quartz, flint, or obsidian were common. Mortars and pestles and metates as well as hammers and anvils, cooking stones and stone charms and beads were used. Tobacco pipes of steatite have been found as well as dishes and bowls.

Bone was also put to use in the shape of awls, scrapers, game bones, and decorated bones. A simple whistle was made from bones as were also beads.

Cordage was made from a number of fibers. The most common was from that of the milk weed. It was used in many ways such as nets for catching fish and birds, snares, and the carrying strap and the sling. Bow strings were made of deer sinew.

The general crudeness of culture of the Central Miwok marks them as relatively primitive people compared to their neighbors in the valleys of the San Joaquin and the Sacramento Rivers.

Beads were traded from other tribes and also manufactured. The olive shell was used whole or cut into curved round disks. Clam shell disks were used as currency. Abalone shells were cut into many shapes. Stone beads are found but not to any great extent.

Food was abundant. Acorns were a staple, buckeyes to a lesser degree. Pine nuts were rich in food value and highly prized. Grass seeds were gathered and ground to a meal. Bulbs and corms were dug. Clovers and other plants were used as greens.

The deer, elk, and antelope were highly relished, although ground squirrels, rabbits, grey squirrels, dog and later horse meat were commonly used. Fish were taken and dried. Salmon was the most common. Quail and pigeons were snared and netted and seldom shot with bow. At times grasshoppers and army worms were eaten.

Personal adornment, other than dress, consisted of black, white, and red paints. These were either manufactured from local mineral pigments, or traded from other tribes. Tattooing was quite common, mostly in black markings. Ears and noses were pierced for ornaments, and feathers were used in head dress. The hair was worn long and only cut as a sign of mourning. Beads were worn as necklaces and used as trimming. The head was commonly flattened by pressing while the infant was carried in the cradle basket.

Dwellings were built in small family groups, except for great camp sites, around the homes of the local chiefs. This accounts for the many small sites so numerous throughout the area. This dispersal served to lessen the

water problem and permitted better hunting and gathering of food.

Houses were usually circular and dug into the ground two or three feet. The roof was supported by poles and covered with brush, grasses and earth. A small hole gave access and permitted the smoke from cooking fires to escape. Homes were probably not more than a dozen feet in diameter.

At the great camps, lodges were built. These were communal and used for ceremonies and party gatherings. During the summer brush houses were built for this purpose. They were not as large but much cooler and well aired.

The sweat house was common to all camps. They were quite small, and used mostly by the men for semi-religious rituals before hunting or war parties.

A small shelter was often built over the mortars as protection from the weather while preparing meal. These were crude affairs and not more than six or seven feet in diameter.

Granaries were built for the storage of acorns and seeds. Bulbs and corns were never stored.

The general crudeness of culture of the Central Miwok marks them as relatively primitive people compared to their neighbors in the valleys of the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers.



LEGER HOTEL

By FRANCES LOMBARDI

Much of the early history of Calaveras County is wrapped up in the Leger Hotel in Mokelumne Hill, operated since 1920 by Myron Greve and owned by his family since 1900.

Part of the present hotel was the Calaveras County Courthouse, as Mokelumne Hill was the County Seat from 1853-66. The hotel does not have a north wall as the south wall of the Courthouse also serves as the north wall for the hotel.

Mr. Greve believes the hotel was built and opened for business by G. Leger and Company sometime before the

year 1857. He has a printed ticket to a grand ball given by the Legers on October 24, 1857, printed by the Calaveras Chronicle. The hotel was first started under the name of Hotel de L'Europe and was changed to Leger Hotel in the early 60's.

George W. Leger was a native of Hesse Cassel, Germany, and came to Mokelumne Hill in 1851. For the following 28 years he was a steadfast promoter of all that was best for the town of Mokelumne Hill. He was 64 years of age at the time of his death, and as he had been an ardent member of the I. O. O. F. Lodge, he was buried under the auspices of this fraternity.

During the early mining days of Calaveras County the Leger Hotel was considered one of the best in California. It was especially famous for Sunday dinners, and people came for miles to have dinner at this famous hostelry.

CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PROGRAM FOR 1953-54

1953

June—Nuggets of Calaveras County.

Meeting held at Calaveras Gem Clubhouse followed by a tour of the Angels Museum. Mr. Daniels in charge.

July—Calaveras Big Trees and Big Trees Road.

Pot-luck dinner held at the Big Trees. Annual reports and election of officers. Mr. and Mrs. Jay Cobb in charge.

August—Vacation.

September—Teachers and Schools. Charles Schwoerer in charge.

October—History of Angels Camp. Utica Mine and Sierra R. R. Dinner meeting. Jim Valente in charge of arrangements.

November—Transportation. Early stage lines, roads.

December—Early Ferries and Bridges.

1954

January—County Seats and County Government.

Dinner meeting at San Andreas. John Squellati in charge of arrangements.

February—Bad Men of Calaveras—Sam Brown, Murietta, Three-fingered Jack, Tiburcio Vasquez, Black Bart.

March—Good Men of Calaveras—Ben Thorn, Judge Gottschalk, Ben Marshall.

April—History of Murphys Area. Dinner meeting in charge of "Mac" McKimms.

May—Caves: Cave City, Mercers, Moaning.

June—Early Placer Mining. Bars on Rivers.

July—History of Valley Springs. Sierra and Big Trees R. R. Dinner meeting at Valley Springs in charge of Percy Hunt. Annual reports and election of officers.

This is the tentative schedule that was adopted at the June meeting. Unless otherwise indicated the meetings will be held in the Courthouse in San Andreas.