



Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society
Volume XVII July, 1969 Number 4

NEGROES ON THE LODGE

Negro people are seldom seen in Mother Lode country today, and perhaps we tend to forget that they played a much more important role during the gold rush. Some slaves came with their masters to help them make their fortunes. Others arrived, free-men or runaways, one was not sure, but who cared, in those exciting days along the Lode.

To Mrs. McMillian's sympathetic account of the Joiners, we have added the names of a few more black families well known about San Andreas a century ago.

The Benjamin Joiner Family

By CECILLE VANDEL McMILLIAN

Between the Catholic Cemetery and French Hill is Nigger Hill, first mined in the very early days by black miners. Among the old negro families were the Joiners, whose past was out of the history pages of the deep south. Their childhood was spent below the Mason and Dixon Line as slaves on a large plantation, in the days before Abraham Lincoln was in the White House. As Mrs. Joiner put it herself, "The Lord be praised! We were freed by President Lincoln."

The Joiner family lived in a simple little cottage under a large spreading oak tree in Hamby's field on the Brewery Hill road near the old stone wall. The cottage was spic-and-span on the outside and neat as a pin within.

Life was never too kind to the Joiners. On February 16th, 1880, Benjamin Joiner, head of the household, was killed by Caleb Johnson. Johnson lived on some mining ground in Old Woman's Gulch, the ownership of which had been disputed by the two men for years. Joiner, accompanied by a young man named Simmons, went over to Old Woman's Gulch to look at the disputed claim. While they were there, Johnson came up, carrying a cane. Johnson and Joiner had some words regarding the boundaries of the ground, the former calling the latter a liar. Johnson then drew a large pocket knife, and stabbed Joiner as he raised his cane.

For years after the death of Benjamin Joiner, his

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JIM BINUM

He was the son of Edmington and Margaret Binum who lived at Lower Calaveritas. — Courtesy of Eva Soracco.

Some Black Pioneers

Edmington and Margaret Binum had been slaves in Mississippi. Judge W. B. Norman brought them west, and allowed Edmington to work out his family's freedom on the Lloyd and Norman ranch near Yaqui Camp. Later, about 1870, the Binums moved to the old store at Lower Calaveritas. The Binums were half-negro. The large family was well liked and respected by its neighbors.

Probably the best known black in Calaveras County was Ben Buster, who was reputed to have buried a large amount of gold on San Antone Ridge. Another negro, Philip Piper, ran the popular Main Street House, a restaurant, in San Andreas during the fifties. This establishment burned down in the big fire of 1858.

Ferguson, a negro, operated a blacksmith shop at the forks of the Angels and Upper Calaveritas roads in the '70's and '80's. His wife, "Granny," became a kleptomaniac in her later years. John Ferguson, a son, was involved in the murder of a store-keeper named Johnson, about 1870, on the Calaveras River, and was subsequently hanged.

The Benjamin Joiner Family

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widow worked for different families of Mokelumne Hill. When she became old and crippled, the townspeople supported her. Merchants kept her supplied with groceries. Housewives sent homemade dishes, bread, jams, butter and fruit. Children made sure that she had a supply of firewood.

In her younger days, Lady Joiner was very stout. In later years, she was a small, spry little old lady who always wore a plaid shawl across her shoulders, a white starched blouse, full dark skirt, and a starched white apron with minute tucks and crochet.

Like all the negroes of the old south, she was deeply religious. Her prized possession was an old Bible her mistress had given her when she was a slave. Although I believe she could not read or write, in some way she could tell the different books of the Bible.

When our parents sent us to her little house with home-made dishes and groceries, she would say, "Children, I have nothing to give you but my blessings and my Master's teachings; come inside." She would then seat herself in a rocker, open up the Bible, and teach us the stories she had learned in her early life as a slave.

We children sat at her feet and all joined her in singing the soulful negro spirituals of the old south. Her favorite was, "I Will Meet You on the Other Side of Zion." She always ended with these words: "Children, then I won't be black any more. I will be as white as snow."

What greater gift could she make us, this poor but spiritually rich old black woman than the priceless teachings of her Master. She enriched our lives as children in Mokelumne Hill with her simple teachings of the Bible and the old negro spirituals.

Lady Joiner was over a hundred years old when she passed away.

Back Issues of the Bulletin

The great variety of subject matter printed in LAS CALAVERAS is readily apparent in this list of the principal articles in issues of just the past seven years. We still have copies of these issues, as well as many of the earlier ones, at fifty cents each to members, and one dollar to non-members. (Write Secretary, Calaveras County Historical Society, San Andreas, Calif. 95249.)

1962

- January — Dogtown; W. A. Keefer's Mysterious Disappearance; Jennie Lind Never Came West.
- April — "Uncle Abe" Vandling; Esmeralda; Recruiting in Civil War Days.
- July — Recollections of Calaveras County's First Fair; Camanche; Chili Gulch; Ah-See-One.
- October — Recollections of Fair, concl'd; Old Gulch; Fourth Crossing.

1963

- January — The Tanner Mine; Fatal Duel at Moonlight Flat.
- April — The Chinese in Calaveras County.
- July — The Chinese, cont'd; Rock Walls at Telegraph City.
- October — The Chinese, cont'd.

1964

- January — The Chinese in Calaveras County, concl'd.
- April — In Memoriam: Judge J. A. Smith; Moaning Cave.
- July — Cave City Cave; Mercer's Cave.
- October — Indians at Murphys.

1965

- January — Newspapers in Calaveras County.
- April — The Exploitation of Limestone in Calaveras County.
- July — Mokelumne; 100 Years Ago in Calaveras.
- October — Fourth Crossing.



SAN ANDREAS RACE TRACK

A popular place on certain occasions two and more generations was the race track just east of the present airport, on the Calaveritas Road. An earlier and less pretentious track had been built in the seventies by Andrew Scieffard in the meadow north of Cement City.
— San Andreas Museum.



THE STURGIS AND CHRONICLE BUILDINGS

A view of downtown Mokelumne Hill, taken early in the century, will bring back memories to old timers. The Calaveras Chronicle was founded in 1851 and was published until 1908, when Clarence Getchell bought the old

paper and merged it with his San Andreas Prospect. These two buildings are still in use today, although the ornate fronts have since disappeared. — From a negative donated by Mr. and Mrs. Allen F. Peek.

Back Issues, Cont'd.

1966

- January — Wade Hampton Johnston; The John Peirano Family.
- April — The Canepas of Vallecito; Cosgrove Family History; The Rolleri Family.
- July — The Greve Family; Calaveras County Library.
- October — The Goodwin-Gatewood Duel; Alexander Love Family.

1967

- January — Some Copperopolis Pioneers and Old Timers: McCarty, McCoy, Thompson, Hensch, and Stone families.
- April — Pioneers and Old Timers of Rail Road Flat and Glencoe: Taylor, Houston, Doe, Pickering, Guillemin, McCarty, Day, Laidet, Danielson, Ames, Seeman, and Sandoz.
- July — Some Calaveras Schools; a Supercargo's Sea Chest.
- October — The Stephen Box Family; Calaveras Stage and Teamster Stops; Richard McGary.

1968

- January — The Gwin Mine at Paloma.
- April — More Pioneer Calaveras Families: Southworth, Fisk, Nicholls, Haupt, and Kirk.
- July — The Royal Consolidated Mine at Hodson; J. C. Kemp van Ee; The Big Mill.
- October — Early Quartz Mining in Angels Camp.

1969

- January — A Calaveras Album.
- April — Wade Johnston Talks to His Daughter (1st installment.)

Conference of California Historical Societies

The annual meeting of the Conference was held at San Diego, June 19th through 24th. We are pleased to see that two of our members, Coke Wood and George Poore, were re-elected to their offices for another term. Coke is once again Executive Secretary and George returns as Regional Vice President for the central Mother Lode counties. Mr. and Mrs. Poore acted as our delegates to the Conference.

OFFICERS OF CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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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.

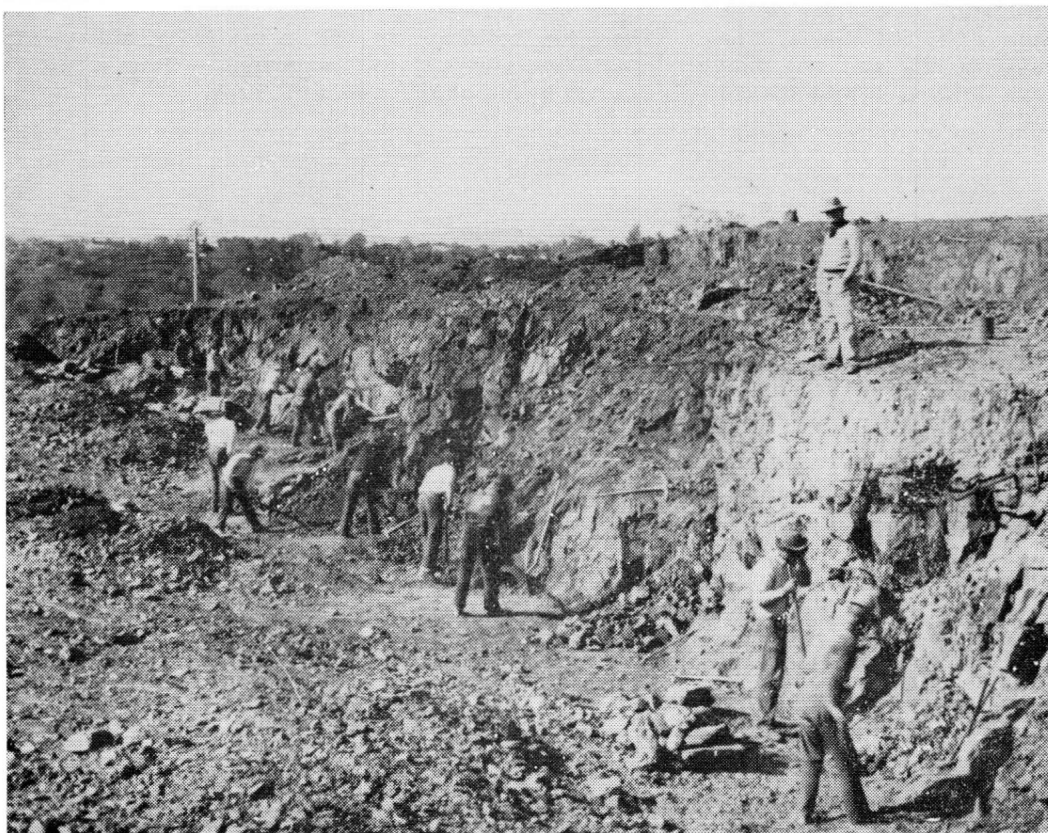
Finance

Our budget committee met recently and prepared next year's budget (1969-1970). Here it is in very brief form:

Balance, June 30th, 1969	\$ 300
Estimated Income (dues and publications)	963
Funds Available	\$1,263
Expenditures	
Sec'y and Treas. supplies, etc.	\$ 225
Program and meeting expenses	145
Las Calaveras (quarterly bulletin)	600
Misc. including Essays, conference dues, delegate exp., binding, etc.	147
Total Estimated Expenses	\$1,117
Balance, June 30th, 1970	\$ 146

New Members

Mrs. Barbara Mohrmann, San Andreas
 Mr. George Koenig, Van Nuys
 Mr. and Mrs. Laverne Widel, Altaville
 Mr. and Mrs. Richard Kelly, Murphys
 Miss Annette Perry, Angels Camp
 Mrs. Ruth Clark, Twain Harte
 Mrs. Florence Griswold, San Francisco
 Danish Brotherhood Cultural Center, Copperopolis
 Mrs. Hattie Gianelli, Murphys
 Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Johnson, Murphys
 Mr. and Mrs. Francis Nicholson, Murphys



DIGGING THE FOOTINGS FOR THE BIG MILL

Readers will remember the story of the Royal Consolidated Mine at Hodson in last July's bulletin. Here is a view of the early stages of the construction of the mill in 1902. Clay Womble, labor boss, watches his dozen or so men, with pick and shovel, digging for the footings. Clay doubled as deputy sheriff for Hodson, in those busy days of the boom in the Madame Felix district. — Photo loaned by Womble Family.