

## CAMPO SECO

Campo Seco was a flourishing town in the early days of placer mining in the county. It was located on Oregon Gulch, which empties into the Mokelumne River at Oregon Bar. The diggings were found by Mexicans as early as 1849. It served a great many of the miners who mined on the numerous bars along the Mokelumne River.

The fire of 1854 was the town's first serious drawback. Later its placers were exhausted and it then depended principally on the copper lodes existing between the town and the Mokelumne River. The copper mine was discovered by two Mexicans in 1859. It soon became the property of Mr. J. K. Harmon who operated it for many years. C. Borger and Fred Wyllie were Superintendents of the property. Later the Penn Mining Company obtained the mine and hauled much Matt from their property to the railroad at Valley Springs. French Hall and Oregon Gulch were rich diggings.

The ore from this copper lode was somewhat different from the copper ore at Copperopolis. The Copperopolis mines produced no gold while the Campo Seco lodes produced enough gold to pay working expenses.

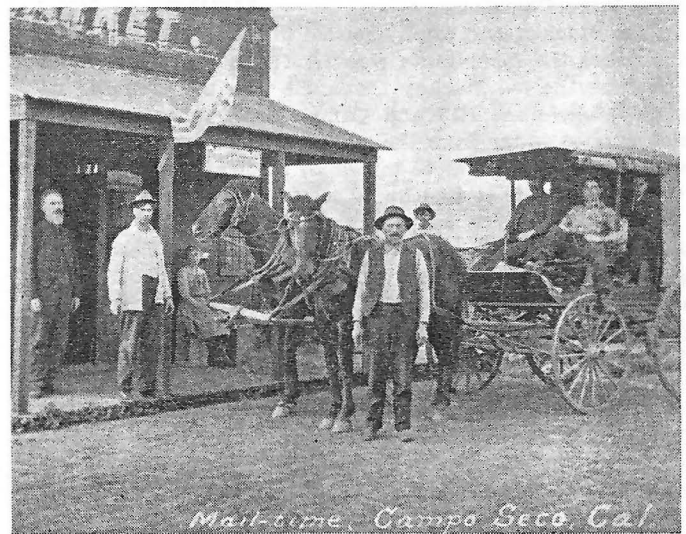
At one time Campo Seco had two churches, a Catholic and Methodist Church, a postoffice, express office, two hotels, a restaurant, four stores, livery stables, blacksmith shop, saloons, a brewery and quite a number of private residences with several large orchards.

The climate is mild and oranges will grow in the orchards. The largest cork oak in California is in the townsite. From it large pieces of bark have been removed for exhibition purposes.

The town had a large Chinese population. In August, 1859, a fire started in a Chinese store and within 30 minutes the business part of the town was in ashes. The entire Chinese section was destroyed. Other property destroyed by the fire was Adam Bowman's Livery Stable, the Phoenix Hotel owned by Mr. J. Symes, Dr. Maxon's office, Cook's

Billiard Hall, the Ney Building, Phillip's Hotel, the post-office building, Butler's Blacksmith Shop, Dougherty's Building, Dutch Bakery, and Ienstein and Company and Wagenheim's Stores were damaged. The Protestant Church that had just been erected at a cost of \$2,000 was burned to the ground.

The town is between Camanche and Paloma and located



**MAIL TIME AT CAMPO SECO**—This early-day scene shows Myrle Maulkemus, Mr. Paulk, Chas. Hatler, Ina Powers, Vic Botto, Joe Botto, Bill Smith, Bert Smith and Paul Villegas.

about one mile from the south bank of the Mokelumne River.

The Mokelumne Hill Canal and Mining Company had completed its line of ditch from the South Fork of the Mokelumne River to the town of Mokelumne Hill in the early fifties, and on January 23, 1854, the company entered into

a contract with John Andrews and Allen Cadwaller to construct a canal to Campo Seco. The contract price was \$95,000. This canal was completed in October, 1859.

Thereafter, the company gave another contract to Andrews and Cadwaller to build a reservoir about one mile northeasterly of the town of Campo Seco for the sum of \$5,000. The parties got into litigation over the building of the canal and reservoir and as a result a large judgment was rendered against the ditch company. As a result of this litigation a new company was organized in August, 1858, and the company was thereafter called Mokelumne and Campo Seco Canal and Mining Company.

In December, 1853, the miners of the district adopted a code of mining laws to govern mining in the district. These laws defined the boundaries of the district as follows: "On the north by Salt Gulch, on the west by Mokelumne River, on the east by Cosgrave Creek, and on the south by the gulch known as Minter's Gulch. Gulch claims were 100 feet up and down the gulch and 25 feet wide. Upon flats claims were 100 feet square. On hill diggings, 75 feet square was the size of the claim."

The laws required that so much work should be done to hold a claim. If sick, the claimant could hold his claim without work.

## CAMPO SECO (DRY CAMP)

By MRS. MAUDE POYNOR

Campo Seco had a glorious past. The booming days of gold saw it a rich and lively camp with forty different nationalities represented among the miners panning for gold. Its population was between 3,000 or 4,000. There was a bank, many saloons, gambling halls, stores, hotels, a brewery, and quite a large Chinatown.

John Mackay and family settled in Campo Seco and for many years the inhabitants would refer to the place where he lived as the old Mackay Place. He was the promoter of the old Mokelumne Hill and Campo Seco Canal Company which carried water from the middle fork of the Mokelumne River above West Point to mines all the way down the line to Campo Seco and to Camanche below Campo Seco.

The discovery of copper in the early sixties revived Campo Seco, and the extensive operations of the Penn Mining Company added stability until 1919. This copper mine was the only one in California to produce merchantable copper ready for use. It also produced enough gold and silver with the copper to pay the running expenses of the mining operations. Copper from the mine was used in the construction of the United States cruisers "San Francisco" and "Charleston." The Stockton Record in 1925 carried the following item in the "Sixty Years Ago" column: "April 14, 1865—Fifty thousand pounds of copper ore from the Campo Seco claim, Calaveras County, arrived in this city. A considerable portion was brought in by pack mules."

Mrs. George Drury (Cassie Gallagher) tells about her father being the first miner to stick his pick into the copper vein. He broke off a piece of pure copper in the shape of an oak tree. The Gallagher family kept this relic for many years until a fire destroyed their home and it was lost.

The Penn Chemical Mining Company operated a large smelter at one time and the fuel for this smelter was hauled in by ten or twelve mule teams from the Valley Springs Railroad. These teams were always so interesting. The lead



Celestino Aros, above, was born near Campo Seco. A pioneer oven is in the background.

mules would wear bells and could be heard coming in from a distance of a mile or so. They would be driven by men who would use one line and their calls of "Haw" and "Gee" could be heard as they would drive down the main street of dear old Seco to the water troughs to give their mules a drink.

(This material has been taken from the scrapbook of Kate B. Lang, mother of Maude Lang Poynor.)

## THE BORGER HOME

Mr. C. Borger was connected with the copper mine and had a large two-story home built in Campo Seco. This originally was the Wm. M. Gwin home and was first erected near the Gwin Mine.

The James Creighton home was a large two-story house erected on the Creighton place just westerly of the town. Mr. Creighton at one time conducted a butcher shop in Campo Seco and had a large herd of cattle. In the summer he took his cattle to a summer range on Blue Mountain. Mr. Creighton married Eliza Ham of Aqueduct, Amador County. He was a Supervisor of Calaveras County, elected from the Jenny Lind District. There was an old French Hospital on the Creighton place at one time. Mr. Creighton was the grandfather of O. C. Wyllie.

## SCHOOL DISTRICT

Campo Seco was one of the first six school districts established in Calaveras County prior to the year 1855.

Out of this district was carved Camanche on September 7, 1860. Part of Oak Grove and Spring Valley School Districts were taken from Campo Seco.

In 1897 Campo Seco issued 12 \$50 bonds for the purpose of building a new school house. Capt. H. A. Messenger purchased the bonds for \$605.

## CAMPO SECO

By LILA EDALGO

Campo Seco was first settled by the Mexicans in the summer of 1849. They began working the rich placers on the Oregon Gulch that flows through the town. Oregon Gulch empties into the Mokelumne River at Oregon Bar, a rich mining bar in the early history of mining on the Mokelumne River.

The hill placers, except what had been carried down on mules and washed, were worked extensively after water was brought in from the South Fork of the Mokelumne River through the Mokelumne Hill and Campo Seco Ditch. Ragtown Hill and French Hill became very active. When the miners could not work the bars on the river on account of high water, they moved back to the gulch and hill placers. Campo Seco became a flourishing town, and the center of a large trading community. The Great Copper Lode was discovered by two Mexicans and a Chilano in 1859. They found native copper in the croppings, and sold it to a storekeeper at Lancha Plana for gold. After discovering the mistake, the storekeeper had them arrested for swindling him and a trial was held. The court was satisfied that the miners were honestly mistaken and dismissed the charge against them but ordered them to return the money to the storekeeper.

Just at the western edge of town on Main Street at the brow of the hill, stands an old oak tree where old-timers maintain two men were hanged for horse stealing.

On the lot surrounding the Maher home, stands the largest cork oak tree in California. This tree was planted by John Mackay.

The town was flourishing in the fifties but most of it was destroyed by fire in 1858. Ruins of some of the buildings still stand. The old Adams Express building with its iron doors is still standing. In the two-story building, the Campo Seco Lodge of Masons and Azalia Chapter of the Order of Eastern Star met. These lodges were afterward transferred to San Andreas.

The old Armory Hall stood on the north side of Main Street, and it was here that Captain Messenger trained his men for the Civil War. These men were sent to guard the Mexican border during the war. The building is now down. Originally buildings occupied several streets on both sides of Oregon Gulch.

While the East Bay Municipal Utility District was engaged in building Pardee Dam on the Mokelumne River, Campo Seco became rather active again, but a disastrous fire in 1928 again swept away all its business houses.

## THE TOWN

Campo Seco was surveyed as a Townsite by H. F. Terry in January, 1870, and patent issued to James Barslay, County Judge, on September 10, 1872. The townsite was divided into 9 blocks and 67 lots. The streets appearing on the Townsite Map are designated Main, College, China, Chilano and Arkansas Ferry Road.

Main Street on the eastern end merges into Mokelumne Hill and Campo Seco Turnpike. This road was created by an Act of the Legislature of the State of California and by a vote of the people at a bond issue.

## CAMPO SECO IN 1860

From the San Andreas Independent, August 25, 1860

The population of Campo Seco in the summer of 1860 is about 300, including 50 Chinese and a sprinkling of Mexicans. The fire last year destroyed nearly the entire town, but most of it has been rebuilt. It contains a few fine gardens, two churches, (one used for a school house) two large hotels, one of them stone, owned by Mr. Nye. A number of saloons and five stores. Mining is dull at present. A branch of the Mokelumne Hill Canal furnishes water for domestic use and irrigation purposes.

In the year 1849, a few prospectors settled in Campo Seco. They found good pay and were soon followed by others. But Campo Seco languished all through the flush times which animated most of the "Ophirs of Calaveras." Her first impulse came in 1854 when the Mokelumne Hill Canal was extended to her mines. On Saturday nights and Sundays in the year 1855 the camp numbered 1200. These times were of short duration. By 1857 the tornado had spent its force. The richest and readiest worked of the diggings and they were exhausted.

## CALAVERAS HILLS

HARRY FEE

They're lying near the sunrise,  
Their slopes of green or dun.  
Sweet with the spring's unfolding,  
Bright with the summer sun.  
Of all the hills where splendor spills,  
They hold the fairest part—  
The hills of Calaveras  
Are the closest to my heart.  
The glamour of their beauty  
With joy my spirit grips,  
O'erflowing into memories  
Of long remembered trips.  
The famous trees they harbour  
Gnarled with the years and brown  
Where centuries tread have built and spread  
The arches of renown.  
The sheep upon the green slopes,  
Where gray roads wind and wind,  
The minstrelsies of murmuring trees  
Against the blue defined.  
The romance of their region  
Laid out with Time's design,  
The miner's hour of glory,  
And the days of Forty-nine.  
The little towns that flowered  
Back in their golden age,  
San Andreas, Angels, Murphys,  
Enrolled on history's page,  
Quaint Valley Springs, Fourth Crossing,  
They're parcel whole and part  
Of the hills of Calaveras  
That lie close to my heart.

The postoffice, established at Campo Seco on February 3, 1854, with T. M. Pauling as postmaster, has been in continuous use to the present time.



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The Calaveras County Historical Society meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at the Courthouse in San Andreas. Dinner meetings are held each quarter at different places in the county.

## EDITORIAL

We are grateful to the ladies of Campo Seco, Mrs. Erickson, Mrs. Pereira, and Miss Lila Edalgo, for their cooperation in getting together material and pictures on Campo Seco for this issue of Las Calaveras. We're sure they realize their efforts are worthwhile as we're preserving this history in such form that it will not be lost.

In response to the requests made at the December meeting of the Society, we're publishing two poems by Harry T. Fee, "Campo Seco Town" and "Hills of Calaveras." We're indebted to Mrs. Frank Weaver, sister of Harry Fee, for these poems as well as other writings which we hope to print at a later date. Harry Fee was a product of the Stockton schools and the University of California and was a businessman in Stockton. He loved the out-of-doors and wrote poems about it for the Stockton Record and Sunset magazine for many years. He published two volumes of poetry—"The Land of Out O' Doors" and "Breath of Pine." Both books are out of print now, but we are happy to make these lovely poems available to all our members.

We certainly should compliment Ella Thompson and Sadie Hunt for the success of the old-fashioned Christmas party. The tree with its candles, cranberries, and cards brought back memories of the days when electric lights were not available and the string of lights couldn't just be plugged in. And, as always, Miss Kaler's memories of Christmas in Murphys in the "old days" was delightful.

A letter from our good friend, J. V. Matteson of Hayward, formerly of Murphys, and son of pioneer T. J. Matteson, praises the book "Calaveras, Land of Skulls" and makes

the following interesting comment: "Statements about my father are much appreciated and may be correct. When my father arranged for transportation by ox team from Stockton to Murphys (1849), he was compelled to leave several trunks of valuables. Later, when he returned for them, the trunks were filled with rocks.

"As to whether they really had Joaquin Murietta or not, my father told me that when they brought Joaquin's body into town, they sent for his mother. She said, 'I can tell blindfolded if it is my son. Joaquin had a bullet wound in the middle of his forehead.' When she put her finger on this wound, she said, 'This is Joaquin.' In 1891 I visited the Jordan Museum in San Francisco, and I saw Joaquin's head and Three-Fingered Jack's hand in jars. I noticed particularly the large hole in the middle of the forehead of Joaquin."

The East Bay Municipal Utility District built its Pardee Dam on the Mokelumne River near Campo Seco in the 1920's and during the construction the town enjoyed a boom. The completion of the dam and another fire left the town with only a few buildings and residents.

## CAMANCHE CAMP

(Sacramento Union, April 23, 1858)

Camanche Camp — A correspondent, writing to the Union, April 21st, from this camp in Calaveras County, gives a very favorable account of the general business, as well as mining prospects of the place. Referring to its location, he states that it is situated about one and a half miles from Poverty Bar, on the south side of the Mokelumne River, on the road from Mokelumne Hill to Stockton, eighteen miles from the former place, and twenty-eight from the latter. The camp boasts of four grocery stores, two clothing shops, two hotels, two blacksmith shops, one meat market, two drug stores, and billiard rooms and whiskey mills in abundance. Speaking of the mines and other matters, our informant remarks as follows:

"The mines continue to pay well. The McGungle Brothers have struck dirt that pays from \$1 to \$8 to the pan. Dutton & Co. are taking it out big, say from \$300 to \$500 per week, for three hands. Coombs & Co. on Sand Hill are still getting good pay. Wilcox & Co. are making \$50 a day. In fact, all who work are doing well. The proprietors of the Mokelumne Hill and Stockton stages will run a four horse coach daily through this place, after this week..." and permanent outsiders."

(This copy was sent to Miss Cavagnaro from the State Library. We think the date may be incorrect as all our data says town started shortly after 1849 Gold Rush—not later than 1852.)

A reprint of an article in the Sacramento Union, April 23, 1859, on Camanche Camp.

Erwin G. Gudde says that it "was named in 1849 after a town in Iowa." This date is more reasonable.

The name Campo Seco is apparently Spanish for dry camp, although "campo" also means field or country, and indicates the lack of water for washing the gravel of the early miners.