

TAPE #40

MARIPOSA COUNTY 125TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Taped: June 1979

Subject: Mariposa County Museum, stamp mill, wagon train and  
campfire tales.

(The following conversation refers to the operational stamp mill  
which is located at the Mariposa County Museum.)

Now I'll get the water turned on...and put tension on the belt.  
That's the idler wheel there. You ride down on it, and that keeps  
tension on the belt.

(What's the basic power source?)

Electric. But they ran them on steam and by water power in the old  
days.

Come on up here if you want to see how this thing works.

OK, turn her on!

(The sound of the five-stamp mill follows on tape for about two  
minutes.)

(How is the gold separated?)

The gold and the mercury are in a combined state. The mercury  
evaporates, and they catch it in a condenser, and they re-cycle it.

(How is the surface of the pan coated?)

It's coated with mercury with a brush. The rock and sediment are  
washed off, and the mercury holds the gold. Then the mercury and  
the gold are scraped off and the process to separate the gold from  
the mercury begins.

See the skip loader down there. Well, it ran up on this rail and those other wheels on the skip tipped it over and into the hopper of the stamp mill. The skip went right down into the mine, and there was a screen, like a cattle guard, over the ~~hopper~~ hopper so that only six inch rock would go through it. The rest was pressed in a jaw crusher.

Here is an older stamp mill. Notice that the stamps on this one didn't have a cam-shaft that made them rotate. It's made out of square wood shafts. Well, it wasn't the best, so J.C. Hendry Co. in San Francisco built the one that you just saw working.

Now, what do you think of this!X

(We are shown a six foot long bit, that is about an inch in diameter.)

(What is it?)

The miners didn't carry pipe with them when they came up in the hills. And if they had to run water over a long-tom, why they'd take a piece of wood and bore a hole through it, right down the center. That's work!

Here is one of the early pneumatic drills, it killed them off in about four years from the dirt and dust. Later they used the drill with a hole through the bit for water. It was the dust from the quartz rock that killed them; it was sharp.

The miners used to fight to use one of those early drills, rather than the old bit and hammer method. The stamp mill was patented in 1858.

(The following took place around the wagon train campfire outside of the town of Mariposa. The date was Friday, June 8, 1979.)

If this is your first wagon train campfire, let me tell you it's a bit of the old west. We invite people to share and reminisce with us about how Mariposa County was in the good old days and I like to think we are living in the good old days right now!

~~XXXX~~

Now, Faye Dyre is going to read a poem, and she'll tell you a little more about it---Faye Dyre!

Beth Hatcher Robinson

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ wrote this poem. It's called "Ode to the Mother

Lode":

When spring came the wander-lust was roused in me, and so I must to distant places. I journeyed then to follow the trail of other men. My wandering carried me not too far to a place where long ago they cut a path through the wilderness to arrive at last in this wonderful place called the Mother Lode. As I rode along and painted the ruins there my thoughts went backwards, and I saw not ruins, but the world when such men as Fremont, Sutter and Bret Harte, Mark Twain claimed this place as their domain. Such places as Carson Flat, Agua Fria, Gorman Bar; mines that were famous; the Princeton, the Morning Star, (something) Mint, where gold bars were made; the assay office and Fremont's store; Benton's Mill where was extracted the precious ore---these are the stories that unfold of the men who lived in their search for gold: rich man, poor man, beggarman, ~~thief~~ thief; doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief. Coming here their fortunes to seek, while others ~~lie~~ lie buried in graves unknown, because they were brave and travelled alone.

For to these places came also men to loot and to raid; Joaquin Murietta and three-finger Jack, desperados who lived dangerously as wild trails they laid. Stage coach robberies, wild escapades, through field and forrest, valley and glade. Ghost towns, you say, No, not to me. For so long as men live with the heart of a pioneer, these ledgends will grow and romance unfold of the fabulous days of the Mother Lode.

Our next speaker is from Hornitos. I'm partial, because I'd like to introduce my Mother, Mrs. Edith Turner; she will talk about the war years, from 1941 to 1945:

Well, going back before the war years, the first things I remember when I came to Hornitos were the wonderful old stores there. And they were real stores. You could find everything there. We don't have such things anymore. Supermarkets don't compare. But anyway, then my husband worked in the mines. The mines were all going, and then, later, wartime came and everyone went down to the shipyards and the mines were pæatically shut down. My husband continued to work on the ranch then; you had to do that or something vital to the war effort. Then during the war years, I can remember many, many nights up on the hill near the church at Hornitos, they had a little shed where we watched for airplanes. You phoned in whenever you heard a plane. I certainly heard a lot of prop planes, and I still know what they sound like. Some people don't believe it when you tell them civilians were out watching for planes. They didn't have the modern detection equipment they have now, and they wanted to know if the planes we heard were ours.

Usually we put in our hours in the evening, and many people took turns. Since then things have gone up and down. Sometimes it's busy; sometimes not so busy. There are a few new people in town now, and it's still growing a little bit. Thank you.

And now we'll hear from Daisy Wilson:

I guess everybody knows I didn't come up here to speak. But, I've been here for a long time. And my family's been here for a long time. My Grandmother, where I live now, had 14 children and also had time to be a mid-wife. My Grandfather was a carpenter and built the first caskets up there at the cemetery. My father drove the bus from Hornitos, and my mother drove the mail stage to Snelling. All of us sort of been here a long time! With my great grandsons, it makes six generations, so we've been here a long while.

Our next speaker is going to tell a little bit about the old hotel in Hornitos, and then a little about her father, who was a telegraph operator. Here is ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Eleanor Crooks:

I'm surely not prepared for this, but I can go way back to Hornitos days. My Grandfather and grandmother an old hotel that later, I guess, was torn down. It was used as a movie prop at one time. And my Grandmother told me about one time when my Grandfather with another man came to the Mariposa Grove of big trees; he must have come on horseback, and they got into a bad storm, and his companion and their horses camped overnight in the tree.

He came out here in 1849 across the Isthmus of Panama. My Father came across the Isthmus in 1854 when he was six weeks old.

And he was carried on the back of a lady, and his older sister told that he howled all the way! Then they went to Sonora and lived there. Father was the first telegraph operator at Yosemite. I think it was 1872. He was there when the Coulterville Road was opened into Yosemite. He and Henry Hedges used to have ~~big~~ big arguments over which road opened first; the Coulterville Road or the Big Oak Platt Road (?).

My home has always been at Ahwanee. My folks had a luncheon station ~~at~~ on the old horse drawn stage route. I've been away from there, but that has always been home to me. I don't know anything else!

Now, to get away from Hornitos, and interject a little history. Where the NAPA Auto Parts store is now, used to be a theater. That's in Mariposa. I can remember the theater well, and forgive me. I'm MC and I can say what I want! It was always hot in the summer in there, and you'd sweat a lot. But it made up for it by being super cold in the winter. But back before education was the way it is now, now you've got all these sex-ed classes, but back then, that old theater...well, I better not go into that now! But, seriously, before it was a theater, it was a livery stable back about the turn of the century. And I believe it was my two great-great uncles who ran it. It was the Turner Livery Stable. Now, on with it. Let me introduce Mr. Sam Conway:

I can give you a little history of my family, I guess. My Grandfather came to Mariposa County in 1850. My Father was born near Sherlock's Creek in 1864. I was born up at Cold Springs in 1908.

My grandfather helped build most all the roads ~~in~~ and trails in Yosemite. My Dad ~~had~~ hauled most all the freight from Raymond to the old hotel. At Cold Springs the folks run a way stop. They had rooms and meals. They had two big barns and a ~~xxxxxx~~ corral to take care of the stock. Back in them days we allowed the cattlemen to take the sheep and the cattle up and feed them on the park in the summertime. We had 500 head in our corral one night, and something ~~skamped~~ stampeded them. Knocked the corral down, and it took the cowboys about three weeks to round em all up! I guess that covers most of what I know. I know a little bit more, but I'm tired of talking now!

Now, moving right along I'd like to introduce a member of the "Merry Posers", the community theater group, a man who gives the greatest dramatic readings, Mr. John Gresh:

(The reading, which I am not including, was "The Shooting of Dan McGrew, by R.W. Serviss.)

Well, we have one last person to hear from. I'd like to introduce Mrs. Preston, who is going to do a musical solo for us. On the harmonica! And I'm not going to tell you how old she is, because that wouldn't be gallant!

That concludes the featured speakers. The Serenaders are set up to go for dancing, so thank you all for being here at the 1979 Wagon Train and hope to see you again next year.