

TAPE #11BOB PORTER, VOLCANOGERT AND ARNOLD JONAS, VOLCANO

Recorded: February 1979

Reference: Defender, California and The Defender Mine
Early days in Volcano.

Gert---I can remember a lot about the hotel (St. George). But more later.

I was a Baroni on one side and a Kirk on the other. Granda Kirk used to own the hotel down here. When we were kids we lived down there. I was born here and then we moved to Stockton. Three girls. There were a boy and three girls born here. Then there were two boys born in Stockton. Used to have that front bedroom that the Inman's have now. I can still see her sittin in the window doing her crocheting. I remember the big kitchen and the big, long table. You had to have a long table to feed us all. Then there was a building out back, it was all bedrooms, but they tore them all down. Then finally, Walter took it over. He tore them down. We didn't see a car for weeks at a time. Kids could play in the street. After my Grandfather left it was sold to a man from Jackson. Then in 1930 about Walter Bloomquist took it over. But it was closed for years before that. When my family owned it the place was mainly filled by boarders. Arnold's mother used to cook---they had regular boarders.

Porter---I'll tell ya about the Clutes first off. I knew John, Fred and Cora and Ella. Old Fred, he was a half-brother to Pete Clute who run the store down there. They both run the store.

They left here a long time ago, ya know. They had a country store, kept everything. It was next to the sash and door works---to the left of it. I shot the building down---with dynamite. Worked for PG&E and I had to do it. See, they were going to make a dam out of Volcano at one time. They should have tested the rock before they started to blow the building down. They were going to tunnel over here and have a reservoir here. That was in the early 20's. Then they got afraid of this limestone formation. They bought all the ground and had it surveyed. If you notice right below the bridge when you come in, there's a narrow gorge. The dam was supposed to be built there; it's an ideal spot. They had to drill a tunnel and planned to bring the Mokelumne River through this way. Silver Lake has a leak, and nobody can find it.

(Bob, were you born here?)

Yeah, in 1890. It's in better shape than it was in my younger days. Had three stores here. There was Frank Clute down at the hotel, Pete Clute up on this side and Casinella where the store is now. See, there was nothing in Pine Grove, nothing in Pioneer. And they ran delivery wagons around---went clear up to West Point. And everybody traded here, like they do in Jackson now. Jackson was pretty much the same as it is now. But transportation was so hard in those days. The roads were all dirt. The road from Jackson went all the way through to Tahoe. Dust in the summer, mud in the Winter.

(Where did you go to School?)

I moved up to Pioneer. That was in 1891. I went to the Pioneer school up there.

(What can you tell us about defender?)

Say, why is that a lost place? I can't understand why they can't get any data on Defender! Have you seen the hole in the ground where the mine was?

(No.)

You turn off at Pioneer Station. Take the West Point Road. Don't take the new road, though. There's a road that turns off to the left. And you go down and come around a big turn, and you'll see a mine dump down there. A big open hole there---it's dangerous. The store and Post Office were maybe a 100 yards from that. They didn't tear down the town; it just fell down.

(When was the Mine operated?)

About 1906. I don't know how late it worked...We had a ball team up there. It ran off and on for a long time, but the town was gone then. They also sunk the mine deeper. Hoover was tangled up in that. He was up here one time.

(How big was the Defender?)

It went about 650 feet. 360 in my time, but rumors went around that they didn't get all the gold out. So they formed another company and sunk her another 300 feet. Don't think they found much.

It worked for years because they worked it all by hand drilling.

Now, with modern machinery, a small mine like that would be worked out in six months. Fellow name of Joyce was running the mine.

It was all double-jack hand work. You don't get very far with that.

But it kept 20 or 30 men working, with the timber and wood cutting that went along with everything. Course it didn't pay nothing; 2.75 a day. That was the going wages.

Arnold---When the mines were running down in Jackson during my time, that how the old people lived up here; cutting mine timbers.

They cut all the big trees and took em to the mines; used em for shoring and things. The mines worked until the second war, then they closed. After 1925 though, they began to buy cut timber. But before that they got the timbers from the local people. Porter---in 1906 Old man Joyce had his son working in the mine. The old man was running the hoist, pulling the ore up. And his boy, Fred, was a bucket-lander on top. They have a trap door when the hoist is pulling up, they raise the trap door see, and they pull the bucket up over their head. But before you do that you make sure the trap door is closed; that's after the bucket comes out. Old Joyce was holding the bucket up there and here comes Fred over. Careless like all young fellas are. He's got his hook, and he's gonna land that bucket. He started grabbing for the bucket and forget to shut the trap door. Well, he grabbed for the bucket, missed it, and went right on ^{down} ~~down~~ the shaft. At 300 feet he went through a two inch trap door down there. Then he went the rest of the way. I was there when they pulled him out. Nothing to slow him up at all. (How many people lived in Defender?) I'd say about 75. They were scattered through the ~~brush~~ brush. (When did Volcano get electricity?) About 1933. Think only two houses in Volcano had inside plumbing. Had running water, but that was it. Just privies---no septic tanks. Got running water back before 1900. Arnold---My Dad was born here in this town. 1861. He died in 1935. It was a good sized town when Dad was here. A flume or tunnel starts down below town here and tapped the valley pretty deep. And my Grandfather homesteaded that old hotel down there---what the Hell was it? In 1854 I think.

(When was gold first found here?)

Think it was 1850. Gold was discovered down in Soldier's Gulch. Shacks were all around the hills, but most of them just finally fell down. Look across from the Country Store down the street, ya see a bank across the little park---in 1850 there were 6 cabins on that hillside. Once in a while you'd see a bear or an Indian and neither one would hurt you if you didn't bother them.

(What was the law like in those days?)

~~XXX~~ It was pretty rough. You could leave things around in them days. Not now. But there were plenty of hangins around. You'd have a court of your own, and if he was found guilty they'd take him to the first tree and hang him. They hung one guy up by the church. And someone down behind the Post Office too.

Arnold---My dad told me about one. They had the six-gun law.

(Was there a shoot-out on Main Street?)

Porter---That's right. Wasn't too far back. I saw one of the guys after he got out of San Quàntin. They had them old pistols that you couldn't hit nothin with. Finally got one fella through the ribs. It happened just down below the store, but the bench near the parking lot.

But talking about mining---just walk around these hills and see what mining did. Specially with the hydraulic equipment. Just go over in some of these canyons around here. They run those ditches for miles and miles. That ditch up above Boardman Hill---the water come clear from the Mokelumne. Way up in Panther Creek.

(What was the doctor situation then?)

When we moved away from here, up on Pioneer Creek, the closest doctor was in Volcano. There was one in West Point, too. And they'd travel on horseback. Well, my brother broke his leg working up in the woods. We kept him up there in a cabin with his leg slung up in the air, and the doctor made thirteen trips on horseback and the bill was 65 dollars! He was a wonderful doctor; buried up on the hill near Goldie. He lived near where the Masonic Cave is.

Name was Doc Roberts, he married a mean woman, and he'd get drunk. He was a great friend of Arnold's dad. You'd be walking along, and tell him you didn't feel good. Well, he just reach in his pants and pull out some pills and tell you to take them. I put a flower on his grave every once in a while.

(Did they have a lot of dances that you went to?)

Arnold---Every Saturday night there was a big dance. Usually in Jackson or Sutter Creek. Nearly everyone went. And they went to dance---not to fight. Start about nine and last till sometimes five in the morning. They'd shut down for an hour at midnight to have a feed and then start again. All you could eat.

Usually they'd have a six piece orchestra. Tickets usually cost a dollar. Had to pay sometimes a hundred for the band. But they come out ahead most of the time.

Porter---In 1914 I worked on the Silver Lake grade. Dollar six bits a day. Went up in July and come out in October. I saw two automobiles the whole time. I think there were only about two in the County. The Downs people over at Sutter Creek---took wealthy people to have one. And Sakall, they had one.

Arnold---My Dad bought a ~~XXXXX~~ Model T---I think he was the second one around here. That was in 1915.

Did you have trouble getting up the grade out of Volcano?)

Had to turn around and back up. Car was gravity flow and the gas tank would be lower than the engine if you didn't back up!

(Were there any Indians up here?)

A few. I remember eight or ten. There was a family up by Buckhorn. Some Indians camped right on that hill. But it was mostly Chinese. Arnold---My Dad claimed that this place where you go over the hill was all Chinese. They mined like everyone else. After the white people got through mining the Chinese ~~wax~~ would come along and go over the place again. You better not go along behind them if you figure on finding any gold.

(Were there any black people here?)

No. Not until they began to work at Preston School.

...There was a big blacksmith shop just this side of the street, down where the brewery is.

(How did you keep your food fresh?)

Porter---Hang a box out under a tree with barley sacks all over it. Water would drip on the sacks---you got along alright.

(I imagine most people walked a lot.)

Arnold---Yeah, one old fella, he used to walk to town here from way up the hill. He used to come in his slippers sometimes! Then there were some guys who lived up by Daffodil Hill. They all walked to town.

(Did you go to school in the Volcano school house?)

Gert---Yes, Arnold and I did. All the teachers used to board at the hotel, that's one teacher at a time of course. About 25 kids went and we had one teacher who taught all the subjects.

Porter---I went to school with boys who wore mustaches! You know, there were ten grades in our school. You learned more than the high schools teach today, I'll tell you that!

(You just mentioned a chivarie. What was that?)

Well, you'd get married, and you't have a chivarie. Like a reception. Friends would come over to your house with cans and drums, and they would keep beating on these things till you had to let them in. You'd feed them and have a good time. In later years they done away with it.

...Lockwood Station was a wild place, boy. There was a big two story building right across from where the mailboxes are now. They had dances and shooting scrapes up there. It was a station where the logging teams used to stop. They had stations like that all along the road; they had one at Daffodil Hill. Had a dance Hall at the Deaver Place. That's about a quarter mile from where you turn onto the Fiddletown Road.

Gert---My Grandfather bought the ranch. He mined and ranched. He used to work up in the Elephant Mine in back. Up by the water tank. Last time they worked was in 1922. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

Porter---I ran that monitor that's down here. I ran it a long time.

ARNOLD---My dad was the first person to ride on Old Abe, the cannon. He was three years old when Volcano got it, and someone tossed him up on it.

Porter---Old Angelo Rossi was born here. At the foot of the hill where the ceramic store is now.

Porter---I was always crazy about Mrs. Sing Kee. She'd wear all these silks from China. She sure made good candy, too. Dried fruits with sugar coating! The Chinese would all smoke opium in those days, ya know.