

TAPE #35FRED CLARK

Taped: April 1979

Subject: Suckertown, Fiddletown and the small mines.

Around 1939 and 40 I worked the Fort Ann Mine. We lived at the mine itself for awhile. And then we lived in the area of the Masonic Cave. (The house in which Sara Gillick now lives.)

I worked the Fort Ann from 35 till the first of the year in 39. (We live near the mine and there are a couple of other mines near us. I'll describe the area; perhaps you know the names of the other mines.)

It's gotta be either the Iron Mast or the Caladonia. The Marklee is on the other side. The Iron Mast is just down this side of the creek, maybe that's the one. It was going when I was a kid, and I'll be 70 in June.

The shaft in the Fort Ann was about 100 feet deep. This man named Dingle came up from Los Angeles, and he prospected that mine. The price of gold had gone up you know. They set five small mills up. Well, they went down and pumped out the shaft; the timber was still good. It won't rot in water, ya see. They were bringing out about eight ton a day. Well, we stoped up through that drift. Things were tough and the boss said we might have to go into partnership on this. Well, we decided to sink the shaft 50 more feet.

Well, they finally mined it down to 300 feet. It shortened up and widened out, and it would have cost too much money to get the gold out.

(Where were you living?)

We lived two years right at the mine. Halfway up the hill on the other side there are some cedar trees and a little cabin---that's now. Well, it was a cabin just like that one. But we didn't live there in the winters, of course. The first winter we lived up at the Robinson Ranch near Daffodil Hill.

I was caved in in the Fort Ann Mine once.

(Tell me about it.)

I've got a hole in my hip right yet that came from carbide that burned through me.

The timber collapsed; it was my fault. I was working there alone and I went in to check out the timbers. The foot wall was solid, but the hanging wall was heavy. Anyway, Art Hinton and I were taking turns getting the muck out of the place we were gonna fix. It was about 2 o'clock. Art moved out to the shaft because his light was burned out. I was mucking and noticed that there was a timber taking weight back there. I went back there, and it came down and knocked me back into the drift. I was buried except for my arm. Well, Art pried up some of the rock with lagging that was there and I knew I'd be OK. The hoist man went to ring nine bells, that's the emergency call, and the first pull ripped the rope right off the bell he was so excited. Anyway, they got me out in two hours and twenty minutes.

Well, the carbide was in my back pocket, and it was wet, and the carbide lamp was jambed into my leg and burning a hole in my knee. It hurt like hell, so I took a guzzle of whisky that Art had. That kept me going. The carbide lamp was drove into my knee, prongs and all. And it was burning all the time. This was in 1938 that it happened. No, it was 37.

(Is that a piece of gold from Suckertown?)

Yup, it's from around there.

(Where was Suckertown?)

It was a mining camp as far as I know. Bud Bakeman owns the land it was on. My Dad was born there. There are only a few chimneys and some foundations left now.

(What was your dad's name.)

William Daniel Clark.

(When was he born?)

In 1862.

(Do you know the life span of the town?)

He, my dad, told me my grandfather lived there, but I don't know if he was there at the first or not. He came to Placerville in 1850, and I think he came out here in 1869. He told my dad that a claim was as big as a man's shovel, handle and all. That ain't much of a claim. But he stayed there until they got ditches in and hydraulic mining. He got something like 2200 dollars in 23 days---something like that. They hydraulic mined up there until maybe 1910 or 1915.

They got their water from up in dead man creek in back. Dad said he could remember moving over here from Suckertown. I don't know if he had one ox or a team, but they moved their stuff over. He remembered it well because he had a brother one year older than him. And another brother two years younger. And his younger brother had a new pair of copper toed shoes, and that's why he he remembered back all those years.

(How long do you think Suckertown existed?)

Well, when my Grandpa and Dad moved over the hill, that could have been the end of it. That would be about 1865/1870. There was a lot of mining going on after that, but the town was probably gone. It was not built well; miners would through up just about anything, and when the gold was gone so were the miners.

(What can you tell me about Fort John?)

The old foundation is still there. But it isn't very big, maybe fifteen feet square. You go up the Silver Lake Fiddletown Road to Cedar Pines. Go in and down the road that hits the creek. Just as you hit the creek you'll see a big walnut tree. Black walnut. That's it. I used to go there fishing in the creek. Then the gun holes were still in the walls. But it's all tumbled down now.

(But how do I find Suckertown?)

OK. You go up the hill at the beginning of Hale Road. You come over the top and theres an old house below the road and one on the hill.

Suckertown was right there.

(Why was it called Suckertown?)

I don't know. Maybe because you were a sucker to live there.

But I wonder about telegraph hill; I wonder if anything is left of that place?

(Where was it?)

Who knows? Everyone is looking for it now. It's supposed to be near 49er flat. Do you know where that is?

(No.)

Well, you cross Dry Creek on the Hale Road. You go up, down and over, and that's 49er flat. Telegraph Hill is an entire hill on the other side of that.