



The Three Rocks Report

A Message

As many of you know, I've been conducting historical research in the Diablo Range area of central California north of Coalinga for a few years now. However, I haven't had much of an opportunity to share all of the great things I've been learning and realized it about time I start doing that. This is the first of what should be many monthly newsletters that will begin to share this wonderful and exciting history. I have very many people to thank for helping with this important work and I hope to share some of their stories with you in future editions of this newsletter.

Although somewhat neglected by the mainstream, this region of California has an important and exciting story to tell, and some of these stories had significant influence across the world stage.

The first human inhabitants began making homes and villages in this region thousands of years ago. In fact, ancient human habitation sites are so abundant throughout the region that it sometimes difficult to distinguish where one village ends and another begins. These people lived and raised families here for thousand of years before the Spanish began exploring this region around 1800. The first English-speaking settlers began arriving here about 1850 and region quickly became a very industrious ranching and mining region.

I hope you will join me on this venture by sharing your stories and photographs with this forum as we explore the history of this region of California.

A Story

Picacho

Picacho was a small mining community located in the hills south of San Benito Mountain. The town grew to about 300 people after the Picacho Mine was discovered in 1858 by Edward C. Tully and Wiley Williams. The Picacho Post Office opened on March 3, 1869 and served that community for 12 years before closing on August 16, 1880. Service was then moved to the Erie Post Office in Hernandez Valley. Picacho was served by the Slack's Canyon & Picacho Mine Stage.

Tully and Williams soon sold the mine to a group of east coast investors. Adherble Button, from Hernandez Valley, began managing the mine in 1871 and continued in that office for the next ten years while the mine remained mostly inactive.

Button hired Henry Chambers in 1874 to help him work the mine. An 1875 letter mentions that among the mine's inventories are steel tracks and a 25-ton smelting furnace with condensers. However, the mine remained inactive until a new road was constructed to the mine in 1878 by John Bray. The Picacho Mine was sold to William McGarrahan in 1879 and the mine again opened, but it was troubled by a series of problems. In April 1880, they struck several "veins of gas." In one incident Button tells us that the gas "took fire from candles of the miners and filled the roof of the tunnel with flame" In May 1880, only four men working the mine and were having serious trouble finding men to work the mine.

Button mentions in a May 9, 1880 letter that there was "2 feet of snow to haul through while we were putting up our house and shop at the mine"

The mine was sometime known as Picachos and Los Picachos. In 1902, it became known as the Ramirez Mine for a while, when it was operated by Ramirez Consolidated. It was called the Hernandez Mine after 1913 when it was operated by the Hernandez Quicksilver Mining Company. The last known work occurred in 1939.

Visitors today find it hard to believe that this area was once a lush pine and cedar forest. In their 1881 book, Elliott & Moore makes an interesting observation about a "forest of pines and cedars, some trees measuring five and six feet in diameter." Jack James, an octogenarian and descendant of area pioneers, remembers seeing 12-foot diameter stumps. By 1900, most of the forest was harvested by the nearby New Idria Quicksilver Mine.

— References —

- Button, A. T. D., *Adherble T.D. Button Collection*. Letters from 1848-1905. California State Parks, San Juan Bautista State Historic Park. Collection number: 411.1.
- Elliott & Moore. *History of San Benito County, California, with Biographical Sketches of Prominent Citizens*. San Francisco, California: Elliott & Moore. 1881.

The Story Behind that Name

Loma Atravesada

Loma Atravesada is the name of the ridge located on the peak called Three Sisters just above Arroyo Leona. The term Loma Atravesada is Spanish for *Crossed Hill* (or *cross to the other side*). This trail may be the oldest remnant trail in the region connecting the Cantua region with Los Gatos Creek Canyon. An old map shows the trail led over the ridge from Cantua Creek then down into Arroyo Leona at Joaquin Camp and then to the Del Mexico Mine. This was a commonly used trail by miners in the area because Arroyo Leona was impassible.



Three Sisters

The original trail crossed over the ridge and then connected with Joaquín Ridge somewhere between Portuguese Canyon and Pine Canyon and then to the confluence of White Creek and Los Gatos Creek. This is the historic route used by Joaquín Murrieta and his horsemen to travel between El Rancho Cantua and Las Tres Piedras (Joaquín Rocks). Of course Joaquín didn't blaze this trail, he simply followed a route that was established by the Tachi Yokuts long before Alta California.

Henry Carrillo (son of Juan Carrillo of the Santa Margarita Mine) tells a story about discovering a grave along this trail while he was hunting there in the late 1940s. He asked an old timer about the grave and was told the story of a young Mexican couple that was about to have their first child. The husband worked at the Del Mexico Mine. When his wife was nearing her time, they decided she should stay with friends who lived in the small pueblo at the confluence of Arroyo Leona and Cantua Creek. However, fate did not favor the young woman as she went into labor during the journey up the mountain and the young woman and baby died there. Sadly, the young man was forced to bury his family along the trail while crossing to the other side of the mountain. The marker for this lonely grave has since vanished along with the name of the young woman buried there.

If anybody has more information about this story, please forward it to the editor at the address on the back of this newsletter.

A Reader's Story

We want to invite and encourage readers to share stories with us and we are creating special section in the newsletter for just that purpose. Please share any story that you think is important or that others might enjoy reading. If appropriate, we'll publish it in an upcoming edition of the newsletter. Don't worry about your writing skills; we can help you with that if necessary. If possible, try to include quotes and photographs. Try to limit your writing to one or two pages.

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Pioneers and People

Benjamin Williams

Benjamin Williams lived with his family in Priest Valley at the end of Williams Hollow. Benjamin Williams was born in Ireland about 1805 and moved to the Pacific Northwest where he was a Mountain Man for the Hudson Bay Company. He settled in the Oregon Territory for a while and married an Indian woman named Nancy Anne Wasimous. She was the niece of Chief Weremus of Willamette Falls, Oregon. Benjamin and his wife moved to Priest Valley, California around 1850. Their daughter Julie was born in Priest Valley in 1851. Benjamin and Nancy Anne had eleven children.

Benjamin listed his trade as a hunter. His daughter, Emma, once told a story to a newspaper reporter about one of Ben's grizzly bear encounters:

Ben was 73 [1881] at the time. He had gone out on the trail of the marauder, when suddenly he heard a noise in the brush close by. Luckily, his gun was cocked for the bear was on him in a flash.

The barrel went into the animal's mouth as Ben pulled the trigger. Even at that, the bear managed to claw the old man badly before Ben could get out of reach.

(Unknown newspaper and date – copy courtesy R.C. Baker Memorial Museum, Coalinga, California.)

Both William and Nancy Anne are buried in the William-Duckworth cemetery located in Priest Valley, California.

Williams Hollow, which connects to Los Gatos Creek is named for his sake. As most people know, the term "hollow" is word that people from Kentucky used for "canyon." There is little doubt that this canyon's name was originated by Anderson Akers, who along with his brother-in-law Henry Chambers came to Hernandez valley in 1869.

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Three Rocks Research
142 Iowa Drive
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Three Rocks Research Newsletter
142 Iowa Drive
Santa Cruz, Calif., 95060

or send an email message to ray@3rocks.org

Ph. (831) 427-0918

Fx. (831) 427-0928

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