



Three Rocks Research

So that others may know ...SM

The Three Rocks Report

A Message

The passing of Mr. Jack James on July 14th brings a great loss to the community. Jack will be remembered by each of us in special ways, but remembered by all as an accomplished, hardworking honest gentleman who gained the great success of being admired, respected and loved by everyone who know him.

Mr. James had a diverse career, beginning as a cowboy and later becoming an accomplished dozer operator, welders and successful miner. The James-Thickstun claim, a chromite placer claim discovered by Jack James in late 1951, became one of the states largest chromite producers. Its name was later changed to the Mistake Mine when they discovered that it was actually a load claim, rather than a placer claim. James opened a second claim in 1953 with his father-in-law, James Corbet, and another area pioneer, Joe Byles; together they partnered the James Corbet Byles Mine. James was also a highly regarded and sought after dozer operator. During his career, he cut most of the road and mining trails found throughout the New Idria Mining District.

Farewell Mr. James, may the Lord keep you near.

A Story

Hernandez

According to Pete Frusetta, Hernandez Valley was named for Augustine and Jesus Hernández. H.E. Salley states that the name "Hernandez" commemorates Rafael Hernández and Jesus Hernández, farmers in the region in the 1870's. A.T.D. Button purchased Augustine's ranch in the 1870's.

Postal authorities established Erie post office in Hernandez Valley in 1874, changed its name to Hernandez in 1892; they moved it back in 1896, and closed it in 1936. James Frank Taylor opened the first general store in Hernandez Valley in 1874. He sold it to Augustus Brunetti in 1880. Brunetti built a saloon and the Del Monte Hotel. Hernandez Valley is now partially covered by the Hernandez Reservoir, which was completed in 1962.

San Benito Advance, March 3, 1877 – Southern Correspondence; New Idria — Hernandez Valley is about 6 miles in length and averaged about one in width. Through it meanders the San Benito, abounding in choice salmon and suckers. The soil is a mixture of sand and adobe and apparently very fertile. Where the adobe abounds, as is the case universally, the land cannot be tilled, if not exactly in the proper state. Consequently, some farmers in the valley are just beginning to plow. For miles around, mountains rise on mountains, tiring the eye with their somber monotony, and adding greatly by contrast to the beauty and usefulness of this little vale. Descending the mountain, we come to a small schoolhouse, the scene, during the past year, of the useful labors of Mr. Martin, a well-known teacher of this county. Turning to the left, we find the resident of Valentine Garner, who has lately removed from Bitter Water Valley. Mr. Garner has a fine farm, well watered and well stocked. Below him is the ranch of Wm. Short, a prosperous and intelligent farmer. In the upper end of the valley is the well-conducted farm of Judge Button, who is not only a successful farmer, but a well-educated gentleman. Each of these gentlemen have on hand from 80-100 tons of good wheat and barley hay, for which they find a market at the New Idria Mines, at prices varying from \$30 to \$40 per ton.

At the hotel kept by Mr. Burnett, a road branches off through a canyon, which leads to the New Idria. Taking this route we shortly begin the ascent of the main outlying ridge of the Coast Range. A ride of 6 miles brings us to the summit. Here we have spread out before us, the San Joaquin valley. Toward the southeast we discern the waters of Tulare Lake; farther to the north those, we presume, of the San Joaquin river, while far to the east rise the snow-covered Sierra.

— References —

- Frusetta, Peter C. *Beyond the Pinnacles*. Tres Pinos, California: Peter C. Frusetta. 1990.
- Salley, H.E. *History of California post offices, 1849-1976*. La Mesa, California: Postal History Associates, Inc. 1977.
- Paulson, L. L. *Handbook and Directory of Santa Clara, San Benito, Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Mateo Counties*. San Francisco: L. L. Paulson. 1875.

The Story Behind that Name

Oil City

According to Frank Latta, Oil City was named by William Youle, a pioneer oil man from Oil City, Pennsylvania. He named the place Oil City because he expected it to become larger than the original Oil City. Oil production began here in 1863, four years after the first oil well began producing in Pennsylvania. Although there were a few homes in Oil City, it was never an actual city, just many oil wells.

Pahmit, a 105 year old Dumna Yokuts, told a story to Frank Latta in 1935 that he remembered watching pioneers at Oil City, collecting tar from the same seeps he and his family once mined. The pioneers used the tar they collected mainly for waterproofing roofs and greasing wagon wheels.

The Blue Goose gusher blew here in 1898 at 700 to 1,000 barrels of oil per day. It was followed in the southernmost part of the field in September 1909 by the Silvertip No. 1 gusher, which flowed out of control at the phenomenal rate of 10,000 to 20,000 barrels per day.

— References —

Latta, Frank F. *Black gold in the Joaquin*. Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers. 1949.

Pioneers and People

Dick Wright

Dick Wright was born Elbert Elworth Wright in August 1868 in Old Gilroy, Santa Clara, California to Samuel Wright and Amelia Almira Orton. The family moved to the Lemoore area in 1868 after Dick was born. Dick was the youngest child of 12 siblings.

The Wright family was among the pioneer families who settled the Lemoore area. His mother who preferred the name Almira Wright was well known locally as Aunt Mandy. We don't know much about Dick, but he appears to have lived most of his life roaming the remote surrounding region; for unknown reasons he settled on Wright Mountain. Dick lived as a hermit in a very simple brush cabin that, according to Jack James, "barely kept the sun and weather out." Dick often prospected with another local hermit named Jim Cosky who had his simple cabin about a mile to the northwest.

Dick had family living nearby in Hanford and Lemoore. Emma Jane, his sister and her husband John Wesley "Wes" Esrey often checked on Dick. Wes was a Fresno County deputy sheriff. Dick would often spend the winter with his sister or other family. Dick's mother died in 1922, his sister, Emma Jane died in 1927, his brother John in 1935 and brother James in 1940; Dick was the last to go in 1945.

Two of Dick's siblings died at birth while Samuel and Amelia were coming west in 1848; the rest of the children were born in Old Gilroy, Santa Clara, California. Dick's mother, father and sister Emma are buried in the Lemoore Cemetery. Dick is buried on Wright Mountain near his cabin where he died. Dick Wright Spring and Wright Mountain are named after him.

According to Bill Esrey, the grandnephew of Dick Wright, "Dick never rode a horse or rode in a vehicle; he always walked." Dick picked up his pension check every month at the Lee Lowry's place in Los Gatos Creek. Bud Lowry, the son of Lee told about how after Dick failed to show up for two months, Lee and Wes went to check and found Dick dead in November 1945.

Announcements***Idria Preservation Project Update***

The project proposal has been sitting in "legal review" at the California Attorney General's office since February of this year. While we all understand and appreciate how busy the Attorney General must be, I would like to speed up the process. The California Attorney General has authority to act on assets of defunct nonprofit corporations. Transferring the property title to the preservation trust is the first step toward protecting this historic property.

Beginning in September, volunteers with the Idria Preservation Project will begin a public letter writing campaign to state and county officials encouraging them to support the Idria Preservation Project goal of transferring the property from the Futures Foundation Inc. to the New Idria Preservation Project.

This campaign begins by organizing other volunteers and media coverage. An anonymous donor is preparing professionally recorded radio public service announcements and a radio and print media press kit is being developed. We need self-motivated volunteers to help in this initial phase. Call Jackie, our campaign coordinator at (831) 421-9628 to learn more about how you can help. Visit the New Idria Preservation Project website at <http://www.new-idria.org> for more information about this important project.

August 25, 2005 – Coalinga Public Library – 9:00 AM

Three Rocks Research and Project Coalinga

presents

New Idria Preservation Project

The presentation includes many display boards, photographs and a 30-minute slide presentation by speaker Ray Iddings.

Don't miss this event – Mark your calendar – Be there!

Presentation made possible by donations from Optima Technology and CARVID Systems, Inc. (831-663-5654) and other sponsors

The Three Rocks Report

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