



## Three Rocks Research

So that others may know ...<sup>SM</sup>

# The Three Rocks Report

## A Message

Erik Zaborsky, the archaeologist with Hollister field office of the Bureau of Land Management and myself met at the California State Library last month to inspect their collection of documents from the New Idria Quicksilver Mine. The collection consists of twelve boxes containing a total of about 7,000 pages spanning the entire history of the mine. The collection includes original 1854 documents—one letter alludes to an earlier quicksilver mining operation that may have been jumped by the original New Idria claimants. There was also a deposition record from William Wiggins in a civil suite regarding the murder of Peter Collins, one of the original mine partners. Other portions of the collection included mining tool catalogs from the 1920s, a letter discussing the disposition of Tiburcio Vásquez' personal belonging after his hanging, and a Foreman's Note Book from 1928. Half of the collection was from Kenneth Rank, a former New Idria engineer and historian who cataloged an immense volume of historical references and other documents.

Regrettably the library is only open for 6½ hours, which is simply far too little time for two people to examine 7,000 pages of historic documents. The research is further hampered by library copying restriction that limits the total number of copies per day to five. Luckily, we were able to review, although hastily, the entire collection. This is an important collection of document that must be reviewed in greater detail when time and money permit.



**Aurora Mine Ventilation Shaft**

## A Story

### *Aurora Mine*

The Aurora Mine, located in the southern Diablo Range about a mile east of San Carlos Peak, is the earliest recorded mining operation in what is today southern San Benito County (then Mariposa County). Work began here sometime around 1851 and the Aurora Mining Company formed in 1852. Jesse Smith and some *Californios* from San Juan Bautista, discovering a rich deposit of chromite ore, thought they had discovered silver and immediately raised about \$9,000 from investors in Monterey. Of course, their venture was doomed for failure because there was no silver, but also because their Treasurer absconded with \$4,000 and left for Chile.

However, their venture quickly attracted the attention of other prospectors and the region was soon bustling with interest. A small team of prospector began a quicksilver operation about a mile to the northwest. They formed the New Idria Quicksilver Mining Company and soon became the world's fourth largest supplier of quicksilver. They also discovered quicksilver at the Aurora Mine and changed its name to the Morning Star Lode, but the name eventually reverted to its original form, the Aurora Mine.

The site was abandoned in 1972 when the New Idria Mining and Chemical Co. ceased operations and it was reclaimed by the Bureau of Management in 2000. Except for few scattered bricks and the ventilation shafts, very little else remains of the mining operations today.

#### — References —

McGarrahan, William. *History of the McGarrahan Claim as Written by Himself*. 1868

*Monterey Sentinel*, November 10, 1855

Perham, Constance. *New Idria Mining Company Records, 1854-1867*. California State Library.

Rank, Kenneth. *New Idria Mines Collection*. California State Library.

## The Story Behind that Name

### *Spanish Lake*

Spanish Lake, located in Fresno County, about 5 miles southwest from San Benito Mountain, is a natural rain-fed vernal depression that frequently fills with enough water so that it retains water throughout the summer. This vernal pool is properly and historically known as Mexican Lake, as it is still commonly referred to by many locals. The name, Spanish Lake was placed on the topographical maps by the United State Geological Survey and hence the current usage.

The name is probably derived from around 1868 when a group of Mexican miners employed at the New Idria Quicksilver Mine formed the *Union Mexicana*, pooled their money, and filed a claim on the *Mina Union de Mexicana*. The trail, from Idria to the mine, went southwest along the ridge until it came to *el lago Mexicano*. At Mexican Lake, just above the Mexican Mine, the traveler turns northeast and journeys about another mile to the mine—hence the lake became known as Mexican Lake.

Local oral history tells that a commonly held myth during the 1800s was that this small shallow lake was the caldron of an ancient volcano. They supported their theory with the idea that the dark gems found in the region were obsidian. Since no naturally occurring obsidian is found in the region, this may be an historic reference to Benitoite - The Benitoite Mine is located about 2 miles to the east.

#### — References —

Interviews with Jack James, Henry Carrillo, and Ken Birdwell.

Latta, Frank. Notes on *Mina Union de Mexicana*. Gail Darling.



**Spanish Lake**

## Another Story

Ron Hall, a descendant of Antonio Águila and Paula Cantua (of Joaquin Murrieta / Arroyo Cantua fame) faxed me this short story by Sig "Mexican Sigui" Christopherson yesterday. (Sigui was the primary organizer of the Annual Pilgrimage to Arroyo Cantua.)

### *Revelation at Arroyo Cantua*

I walked to the bridge spanning the Arroyo, I could fully view the Arroyo Cantua—I could envision the scene of July 25, 1853. Four men lay dead and mutilated.

The macabre scene was devastating to my soul. I wondered for their loved ones, heartbroken, never to know why they had not returned. Water came into my eyes. I looked skyward for divine help and there before my very eyes, on the top of Black Mountain—I saw it.

Through the glitter of my tears—it appeared to be the most brilliantly diamond studded, most huge and ornate saddle that I could imagine, and there—riding low in the



**Joaquin Rocks as seen from Cantua**

saddle—the Four Horsemen of Arroyo Cantua. The most magnificent monument ever created to man and horse. I stood trembling at the immensity of this divine creation.

We may now look to the divine monument to the Four Horsemen of Arroyo Cantua, and we can feel the power of your hand, dear Lord, our suffering is our strength. The spirit of the Four Horsemen ride with us. We shall forever heed the suffering of others, we shall practice goodwill.

*Sigui - 1980*

## Pioneers and People

### *José Maria Larios*

José, with his wife Juana, homesteaded in Larios Canyon (misspelled on maps) sometime in the mid 1800s. They were among the earliest settlers in the Vallecitos, now located in southern San Benito County. José was born in 1826 to Manuel Salvador Larios and Guadalupe Castro. He was named for his grandfather who came to San Juan with the Anza expedition. His father, Manuel, was the original grantees of the 33,000-acre *Santa Ana y Quien Sabe* land grant.

We don't know why José and Juana made their home in this remote region of California. We might speculate, that because they, like many other heirs to Spanish and Mexican land grants who lost their heritage during the volatile transition that occurred after California joined the union of States, became disenfranchised by a new system of government and culture that they believed stole their inheritance. Or, it may simply be that they chose this place for its beauty and abundance. Pastures here provided excellent grazing for their sheep and there was good hunting in the nearby woodland. Large herds of antelope and elk ran in the valley, there was crayfish in the stream that passed by their home and the San Benito River, with seasonal salmon, was only about 6 miles away. For special treats, Juana probably made Mexican pastries with *panoche*, that mysterious Native American manna for which Panoche Valley is named.

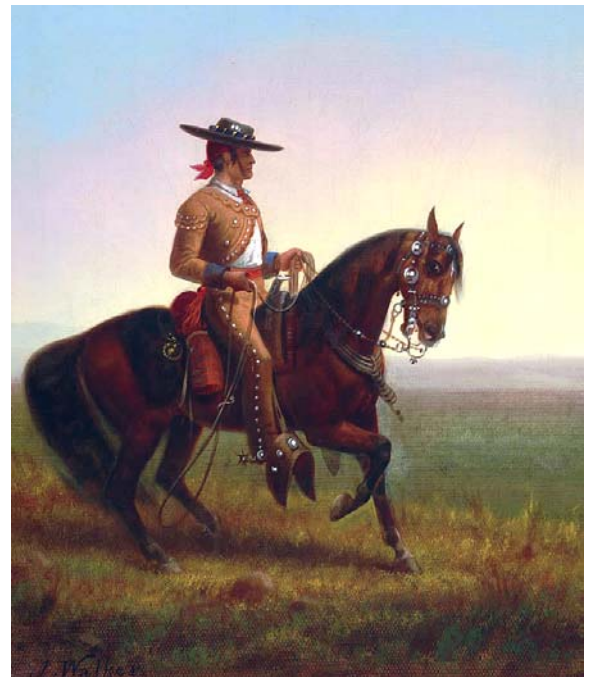
Joaquín Murrieta often herded wild horses past their home on his way to the Cantua. Joaquín soon became California's most famous outlaw, yet to his neighbors he remained an honorable gentleman—a respected *Corredores de Mesteños* (Mustang Runners) who gathered the wild horses that ran in large herds throughout the area. The New Idria Quicksilver Mine, which quickly became the world's fourth largest producer, was discovered only a few miles from their home.

#### — References —

Patricia Ashurst Interview.

Bancroft, H.H. *History of California*, Vol. 1 & Vol. 2. Santa Barbara, California: Wallace Heberd. 1886, reprint 1963.

Latta, Frank F. *Joaquin Murrieta and His Horse Gangs*. Santa Cruz, California: Bear State Books. 1980.



**Don Manuel Larios**

Oil on Canvas, Ca. 1878.  
Courtesy The Bancroft Library

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March 2006

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