



The Three Rocks Report

A Story

Idria

The discovery of rich cinnabar deposits in the southern Diablo Mountains in 1853 lead to the development of the worlds fourth largest quicksilver mine. The claim was filed for "New Idria" by Henry F. Pitts, Rafael Ripa, José Dolores Molina, and William Norrlin on March 20, 1854 and the town of New Idria quickly sprung up on the northeastern slope of San Carlos Peak. The town's name honors the world's second largest quicksilver mine, the Idrija Mine located in what is now Slovenia. Other mines, such as the Aurora, Alpine, Clear Creek, Picacho and Fourth of July mines soon opened and the area became quickly became a bustling community as miners, ranchers and farmers began moving in the area.

California quicksilver mining became very profitable during the 1850s because mercury was needed for extracting gold from the ore during the California gold rush and the discovery of the New Almaden and New Idria mines freed American's gold industry from European control, which dominated the world production previous to 1850.

The opening of the New Idria post office in 1869 gave official title to its name, but the post office dropped "New" from its name in 1894. The post office served the Idria community for more than 100 years and closed in 1974 with the closure of the New Idria Quicksilver Mine. There still remains two cemeteries and several-dozen buildings in the town in various states of decay (including the large smelter and mill at the northern end of town). Today New Idria is State Historic Landmark # 324.

San Benito Advance, December 12, 1874 - The New Idria quicksilver mines are 67 miles distant from Hollister...the altitude is 2,600 feet...A sheriff is occasionally seen but more in the capacity of a detective seeking among the miners for some State prison bird. It is rarely the case that the courts are troubled with criminal trials transferred from this region. The old Californian methods of disposing of criminal cases are adopted at this mining camp and we have every reason to believe that justice is meted

out with more certainty than is generally obtained in courts of the State.

The working force of men number nearly 700 at present, several of whom have families, and most of them are subjects of either England or Mexico. There are but very few voters, probably not more than 30. Some State prison men are supposed to be here, men who have doubtless served out their term of punishment and who retreat from towns and settled districts to live in the solitude of the mountains. Vasquez and his band rusticated here a few days before the murderous raid on Snyder's store at Tres Pinos ...

Captain Maxwell is the presiding genius, his word is law, all employees submit respectfully to his rule and are kept in wonderful subjection. Perfect order abounds...The company has also, in the person of Dr. Greenleaf, a very serviceable and accomplished gentleman. He acts as physician to the miners, teaches school, owns a large band of sheep and is about to farm over 200 acres in the Vallecitos Valley. We heard of the doctor's fame from settlers living nearly 30 miles from the mines. He is respected and appreciated for his generous and skillful services. The school district is said to be the largest in the county, the census representing 108 children; their abodes extend over 20 miles of territory. The doctor has the privilege of dismissing his school at any moment, when urgent cases of sickness demand his services. He is kept busy with his duties and is a most successful worker.

The mails and passengers arrive and leave twice a week by Burnett's stage, passenger fare \$8 from Hollister. Teams are constantly arriving heavily freighted with supplies and lumber, and they return bearing the flasks of quicksilver to the Tres Pinos railroad depot for transportation to San Francisco and from thence to all parts of the world. The yield of the mines for the 9 months ending Sept. last is given at 4895 flasks

— References —

- Salley, H.E. *History of California Post Offices, 1849-1976*. La Mesa, California: Postal History Associates, Inc. 1977.
- Frusetta, Peter C. *Quicksilver Country: California's New Idria Mining District*. Tres Pinos, California: Peter C. Frusetta. 1990.
- New Idria Preservation Project, <http://www.new-idria.org>.

An Information Tip

October is Time to Harvest Acorns

Popping an acorn in mouth that is fresh from an oak tree can bring tremendous surprise, such as you might expect from eating a deadly poison. The tannins in acorns make them very bitter and inedible; but yet, properly prepared acorns add a delightful flavor to many foods. You prepare acorns by removing clean, worm free kernels from their shells. Clean the husk from each kernel and grind the kernels into coarse meal (a small old-fashioned hand grinder does an excellent job). Place the meal on a fine-mesh dishtowel (that the meal won't pass through) and rinse the meal until it is no longer bitter. Slowing pouring 5 to 7 pots of boiling water through the meal usually does the trick, or you can just let cold water flow through the meal for several minutes. At first, the rinse water is clouding and brown, but it quickly begins to clear. Begin tasting the meal when the water becomes clear and continue rinsing until the bitterness is gone.

Acorn meal adds a delectable touch to any dish that uses regular flour, such as cookies, breads, pancakes and muffins. It seems to work best when you substitute about half of the regular flour with acorn meal. Acorn meal adds an enjoyable nutty texture to the food and it is very nutritious.

The Story Behind that Name

Sweetwater Spring

This name comes from the fact that the water from this spring taste sweet. This is one of the most productive and reliable springs in the area, producing good water throughout the year. A small stream flows from this spring and crosses the Coalinga Road near Lorenzo Vásquez' old cabin site. We don't know when this name first came into use, but we know the name is in use 1870 because it is mentioned in the Matthews Diary entry for July 10, 1870. Some people settled at Sweetwater Spring in July 1870 intending to construct a hotel and grocery there. It was probably named something like *Agua Dulce* by the Spanish. Because the spring is so reliable, it was likely an important watering hole for Native people long before the arrival of the Spanish.

— References —

Matthews, Joseph Warren. *Joseph Warren Matthews diaries*. 1869 July 12 - 1900 Oct. 20.

McCray, Vic. T. and Harry W. *Official Map of San Benito County California*. 1891.

Pioneers and People

Henry S. Chambers

Henry was born in Estill County, Kentucky On December 15, 1827. Henry and his brother-in-law Anderson Akers can west together and Henry finally settled Bitterwater Valley where his descendants remain.

Henry was the son of James Chambers (born about 1786) and Elsie "Grandma Smoot" Miller (born 1810 in Estill County Kentucky). He married Sarah "Sally" Akers (born October 14, 1834) on February 17, 1852 in Williamson County Texas. Together they had fourteen children. Henry died May 16, 1888 in Bitterwater Valley, Californian and is buried at the Pine Hill Cemetery. Sarah died September 2, 1923 in Bitterwater Valley and is buried in King City, California.

The Hollister Advance, May 17, 1873 – Another Shooting Affray on the San Benito – There was a shooting affray in Hernandez Valley, on the San Benito, about noon to-day, between Henry Chambers and John Neisson, which came very near resulting fatally...It appears that Chambers was building a fence on or near the claim of Neisson, when Neisson, with 2 others, asked Chambers what he was making a fence there for, when Chambers suddenly drew a revolver...and fired...the ball taking effect on the left side of the head, near the top, and glancing off, cutting the scalp... Mr. Neisson is a quiet and peaceable citizen ...

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Donna Hull relates an interesting story in her book *And Then There Were Three Thousand* about a Grizzly Bear attack that has related to her by Jim Chambers the son of Henry:

Short, his hired man Bailey and Mr. Button kept outside the brush and Pa and McHaley followed the track through the brush. It wasn't long before Pa and McHaley came upon the bear. All they had were muzzle-loading guns, so Pa, an excellent marksman took the first shot, but the sun was in his eyes. The bear rose up and came at the men. McHaley took a shot but with his smaller gun, he only angered the animal more. The bear turned and ran down the mountainside and stopped where the brush grew thick on a small bench. The five men followed, but it was Pa and McHaley who came upon him first. The great bear knocked Pa down, breaking the stock from his gun. Pa was chewed badly before the bear left him and took out after McHaley. It is believed that McHaley tried to climb a tree to safety for when the fracas was over McHaley had a painful wound in one heel and another flesh wound that made it uncomfortable for him to sit down for sometime. The bear was now on the hunt. He deserted Pa and McHaley and went after the other men. He gave Bailey a backhanded lick that sent him rolling over a cliff with blood filled eyes and screaming as if he were being eaten alive. The bear continued his hunt

for Short and Button, but not finding them, he returned to Pa. Pa expected him to return and had rested what was left of his gun on his foot and aimed it in the direction he expected the bear to come. The bear had circled, attacked from the rear instead. In the meantime, McHaley had climbed another tree for protection, Short was firing his gun from his hiding place trying to frighten the bear away, Button was hiding in the brush, and Bailey was still over the cliff. Realizing he was at the mercy of the animal, Pa lay as if dead; remaining in any position the bear moved him, knowing the bear would not leave him as long as he showed signs of life. Chewing and tearing, the bear tore a hole under Pa's left arm, clear to the lungs, so that when Pa breathed, the air rushed from the wound. Ribs were broken before the bear had spent his fury. They made a litter and carried Pa to Short's place and from there by wagon on to our house. Ma woke me up and sent me after Dr Greenleaf. I got lost in the dark fog and had to turn back. Uncle Anderson went for the Dr the next morning.

— References —

- Barrows, Henry D. and Ingersoll, Luther A. *A Memorial and Biographical History of the Coast Counties of Central California*. Chicago, Illinois: Lewis. 1893.
- Hull, Donna M. *And Then There Were Three Thousand*. Fresno, Calif. 1975

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