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MEXICAN MELONES

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As the site of the town of Melones disappears beneath the waters of New Melones Lake, it is most appropriate that we enquire into the derivation and history of this unusual name, and as to the actual site of the original town of Melones.

At last we have a thorough search into the matter and we are very pleased to be able to publish this scholarly study by Professor Jackson and Mr. Mikesell of U.C. Davis. We print this here with permission of the Sacramento District, U.S. Army Engineers and by courtesy of Science Applications, Inc., as the study was part of a much more comprehensive effort by the Corps of Engineers to document the historical resources of the New Melones Lake area.

Not only is the origin of the name and the location of the original or Mexican Melones fully explored, but the writers give us a vivid description of the exciting first few years on Carson Hill, as set down by a number of those who had actually been on the ground. They also dispel certain of the myths that have developed over the years about this fabulous mining district.

Editor

In August (?) 1848, James H. Carson, a Second Lieutenant in the regiment of New York Volunteers, commanded by Col. J.D. Steven-son, discovered gold on Carson's Creek, a tributary of the Stanislaus River. Carson described the event in his *Recollections*, a widely-read Gold Rush source:

Carson, who had been directed by an Indian, discovered what has since been known as Carson's Creek, in which himself and a small party took out, in ten days, an average of 180 ounces each. Angel also discovered Angel's Creek, at which he wintered in 1848. Ever first with the discoveries were Capt. Weber's trading stores - John and Daniel Murpby, and Dr. Isabell being with them. With many traders, in those days, weighing gold for Indians and white people was a different matter; honesty, generosity, and justice marked their every transaction with the Christian, but they had weights and prices for the Indians. And if this should meet the eyes of any of them, they will please

*receive the thanks of the writer for teaching him the art of 'throwing' the lead' for the benefit of the Digger Indians.**

The diggings at or near Carson's Creek was a mainstay of the Southern Mines. William Redmond Ryan, whose recollections were published in London in 1851, recalls the mines in 1849. His description places the diggings some distance up the "ravine" of Carson's Creek, away from the confluence of the Stanislaus River and the Creek. He indicates some sort of retail operation, selling food, as well as gambling booths and shanties.

I had resolved upon seeing a little of the neighboring country whilst I had the opportunity, and learning something further respecting the 'upper diggings,' namely 'Carson's Creek,' and the 'Mormon's diggings,' although both were by this time (1849) pretty well worn out. They are situated a good distance up the ravine, the latter being distant from the Stanislaus about a mile to the diggings....'Carson's Creek,' which derives its name from a soldier who discovered it during a furlough, has been tolerably productive.

*At the time I am now speaking of, however, the mineral wealth of both these camps, as well as of a thing, called Angel's Camp, had considerably diminished, and they were much upon the same footing as the Stanislaus in this respect. I was informed that during the previous winter a great quantity of rain and snow had fallen in these parts of the Stanislaus, in consequence of which, the miners had been exposed to great privations, and provisions had risen to an enormous price, flour reaching four dollars a pound; pork, five; biscuit, three, and rice two; whilst beef was not to be procured at any price. The general appearance and peculiarities of these placers did not present any characteristic differences from those other sections of the Stanislaus to which I have already alluded: there were numerous tents, good, bad, and indifferent; stores and gambling booths; shanties and open encampments; and miners busy everywhere.**

The "diggings" in and around Carson's Creek came to be known generally as "Carson's." One should be cautious in assuming that a town existed, although there is some indication that in 1849 and 1850, commercial enterprise settled about the area known as Carson's Flat, probably the area that is now designated State Historical Landmark No. 274, called Carson Hill.

It cannot be overemphasized, however, that locational names were not systemized in the early 1850s. One must refer location from the context in which a name is used. Before 1851, "Carson's" probably referred to the general area from Carson Flat to the confluence of the stream and the Stanislaus, and was generally synonymous with "Carson's Creek." "Carson's Flat" was probably more restrictive referring to the flat on the north side of Carson's Hill. "Carson's Creek" may have referred to the creek or to the diggings up and down it, or perhaps to the commercial establishments at the Flat. The hill rising east of Carson's Creek, later called Carson Hill, was apparently not yet named, and no town or settlement was yet called Carson Hill.

George Alfred Raymond operated a store at "Carson's Creek" from the winter of 1849-50 to the winter of 1851-52. The following selections from the letters written to his sister give a skeletal impression of the country and society in that mining district.

*Recollections of the Mines, James H. Carson. [Oakland, 1950]

*William Redmond Ryan, Personal Adventures in Upper and Lower California in 1848-1849. [Two volumes, London, 1851] Volume 2: Angel's Camp, p.39.

Carson Creek, March 13, 1850

...I wrote you in my last letter that we had been digging during the winter, and had bought a store. We have been here a little more than a month and have made \$600 clear of expenses...

Carson Creek, June 3, 1850.

I have just received your letter dated April 10th. I had a hearty laugh, to think of your sending paper for me to write on, as I have two or three reams and plenty of pens, ink and envelopes in the Store and could have bought it at any time during the winter for twenty five cents per sheet. I do not know where you got the idea that such things were scarce here. As to the time of my returning home it is uncertain. It may be in one year and perhaps two. I am doing better now than I could digging, and as to my trade, I could not earn three dollars per day at it. I like the country much better than formerly and were it not for the want of society (I mean ladies) the Sabbath and the faces of my friends at home, should be content to stay here. There are no women except a few Spanish and many of the men are mere desperadoes and would as soon shoot a man as look at him. The pistol and knives are used on every occasion and yet it is seldom a man is killed. There was one man who went all over camp trying to borrow a rifle or pistol to shoot me with, because I would not let him have goods on credit, but I did not feel much alarmed, for the cowardly scamp would not have dared to shoot if he had obtained a pistol...

...To-day is Sunday and all is quiet. No Americans work Sunday and but few Foreigners. We have no unpleasant weather during the summer. Every day the Sun rises clear and sets without a cloud to obscure it. The valley and hill sides are covered with flowers of every variety, in fact Cal is a perfect flower bed in the Spring and a scorched and barren waste in the fall. During the winter the grass grows and the country presents a better appearance. There is some of the most wild and picturesque scenery in this country to be found in the world. Within a few miles of us are two natural bridges across a stream 100 feet or more in width, that of Virginia cannot compare with them.

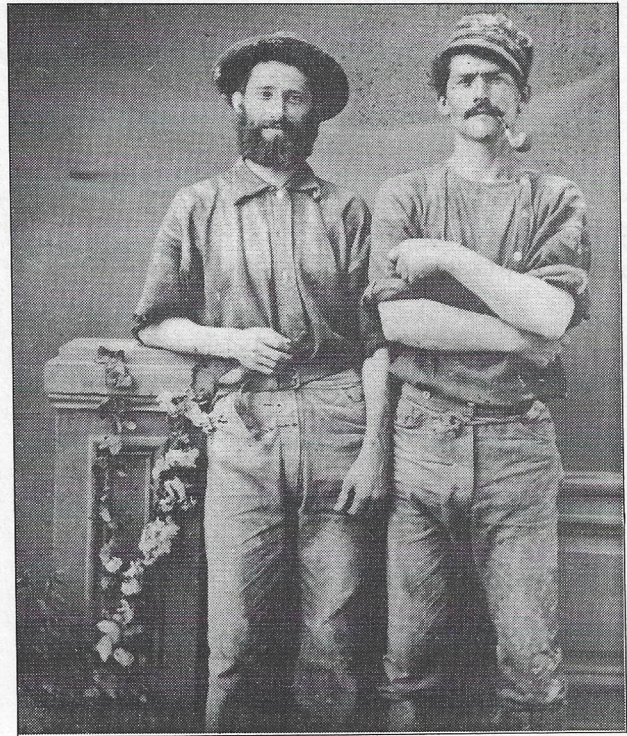
I have but little to write about as things go on much in the same way. We commenced keeping store in February and in April I took a tent and some goods to another mine called the Sais Mila Placier, or 6-mile diggings where I done very well in trading with the Indians, Spaniards, Chinese and in fact almost every nation under Heaven. I can talk pretty good spanish and some indian and get along very well. We have a Mexican in our employ to cut wood and do errands and pay him fifty dollars per month. He is a clever honest fellow but cannot talk English although he is gradually picking it up...

Carson's Creek, Jan. 29th, 1851

...My business has been extremely dull this winter. There has been but little rain and the Mines could not wash their dirt, and of course I have made but little. I have fifteen hundred dollars owing me at this time and I shall probably never get all of it. I am now owing in Stockton to Messrs (?) Pinto and Co two thousand dollars and I have about \$3000 of goods in the store. The prices of provisions have fallen and on many things I am losing money...

Carson Creek, March 3rd, 1851

...I have no boarders now and I do not care to make rice pudding, but at the same time would like to eat one of your make. I never lodged by boarders but gave them their meals for \$12 per week. I never have had more money than I wanted to use in my business and if I had four or five thousand I could make twenty times the amount I now do...



MINERS OF THE GOLD RUSH

The unknown miner is the real hero of the rush to Carson Hill in 1850-51. Hundreds, even thousands, of miners jostled, helped each other, and fought over the gold on this fabulous hill during those tumultuous years. Many of these miners were Mexicans who made their headquarters at the original town of Melones.

Historical Society Files

...I went to Stockton about two months since by a trail which cuts off some twenty miles. It runs through the mountains. It is a lonely road and but little traveled. There was a murder there last summer. I saw four California lions and a number of deer and antelope. I carried eleven hundred dollars in gold dust with me and preferred this trail because I could reach Stockton in one day from my hunters camp...

Carsons Creek, 8th April, '51.

...We have had considerable rain during the last two or three weeks and the miners are beginning to do better. We also had one fourth inch of snow which lasted an hour or two. There has not been two days this winter but what our door has been kept open all day, so you may judge it has not been very cold. The grass is four or five inches high and the hills are covered with wild flowers. Cal is now a Paradise. Three months hence it will be a desert almost equal to that of Arabia...

Carsons Creek, 1st June, 1851

...Since that time I have sold my store and goods for sixteen hundred dollars to Mr. E. Gregory of Albany, the same who started for home with some of my specimens about which I wrote you some ten months since. His partner is W. Bickle from New Orleans, one of the liveliest and best fellows you ever saw, only about eighteen years old (I am now at work in Quartz Rock and have blistered and pounded my hands till they are about as sore as they used to be at home sometimes at Phelps and Gurleys.)

Our company consists of eight men and if we find any gold in the rock we will make a fortune out of it. If not I shall either go to mining on some of the Rivers or start another store...

Carsons Creek, June 25, 1851

...Goods of all kinds are low and we do not make half the profits we did last year. I do not think I shall be able to come home next fall as I am engaged in quartz mining as well as store keeping. In our quartz we have found no gold as yet but hope to. The hole is thirty feet deep.

Carson Creek, 10th Oct. 1851

...I have made ten dollars per day counting from the time I left home till now, and with all my losses have still about four thousand dollars left. Winter is now coming and my quartz mine is taking all the money I make, but if it should turn out well it will repay me and if not I shall lose it. There is a risk in everything and perhaps more in this than anything else, but the chances of gain are still greater and I have spent so much that I want to spend a little more to try to get it back with interest. The miners are coming down from the north and our camp is getting more lively....

Carsons, Nov. 15, 1851

...As to quartz mining, I am beginning to think there is but little use trying to make anything at it, for I have been engaged in at least five different mines in different parts and all turned out failures. In one in which we found a little gold, another company claims and I expect to lose that...

...About all we hear is of some new discovery of gold, or someone shot in a quarrel, or someone's throat cut by the Greasers or Mexicans, and often four or five killed at once for their money. The way I am engaged is the same story over every day. Get up in the morning, cook breakfast, clean up the store, wait on customers, with occasionally a trip to Stockton and San Francisco to purchase goods...

I walked from Stockton to Carsons in a day and one half when I returned from San Francisco, walking 20 miles the first afternoon and forty the next day which I consider some for a city chap...

Throughout most of 1850, miners continued to engage in placer operations along Carson's Creek. A few adventurers however, did venture up the adjoining hill, now called Carson Hill, to pick away at the quartz. In October, 1850, the big find of gold-bearing quartz was made near the summit of that hill. The nature of mining during 1850 can be pieced together from occasional newspaper references. The *Stockton Times* of March 23, 1850, reported rumor of a lump of gold dug out of Carson's Creek weighing 93 pounds. The editor doubted the reliability of this story.

Stockton Times, March 23, 1850

News of a 93 lb. lump of gold dug up at Carson's Creek—humbug.

Riley Senter wrote from Angels Camp, June 23, 1850:

At the new diggings on Carsons Creek 3 miles from us a few did well. We were over several days working but did not make anything of a 'strike,' doing no better on the whole than on our own bar.

Several weeks later, Senter wrote again:

July 7, 1850

At Carsons new diggings 4 miles from us several large pieces have been taken out within a few weeks past — some weighing several pounds each. Some young men [two] tented near us bought a hole that was already sunk and some few hundred

dollars taken out at Carsons about a week since, paid for it \$150... There has been several robberies committed here and at Carsons lately — last week.

In August 1850, the *San Francisco Picayuns* reported that large chunks of gold had been taken from the quartz near Carson's Creek. It noted:

August 20, 1850

We have this moment had laid upon our table for inspection, the largest lump of pure gold which it has ever been our good fortune to actually handle. It was presented to our notice by B. F. Williamson, Esq., of the Exchange Office, Parker House. Its weight is eighteen and a half pounds, as is of pure gold — not an atom of quartz or sand, or other admixture is connected with it. The lump was taken on a Saturday last from Carson's Creek on the Stanislaus, and from the same locality where \$19,000 were taken a short time since in ten days. Twenty dollars per oz. has been offered for it and refused. The successful miner is an Irishman name unknown.

The fortunes of the Carson's Creek area changed forever on October 20, 1850, when William Hance discovered a rich gold vein atop Carson Hill. November 15, 1850, Hance and a number of other individuals, calling themselves the Carson Creek Consolidated Mining Company, claimed about 1700 feet of this vein. Their claim was filed in the following terms:

Carson Creek, November 15, 1850

We, the undersigned, on behalf of the Carson Creek consolidated Mining Company, do hereby claim by right of discovery and occupation all that certain ledge of quartz rock, viz:

Beginning at the southeastern terminus of the quartz rock cropping out to the west of what is called Carson Creek diggings, on top of the mountain directly west of said diggings; thence running northwest parallel with said diggings to the brow of the said mountain facing upon Carson Creek comprising a linear distance of about 1700 feet, with the branches or spurs of said ledge cropping out at different points. Gold having been discovered by members of the said company at different places on said ledge, all of which said ledge is within the said County of Calaveras, about two miles northwest from McLean's Ferry on the Stanislaus River and between Coyote Creek and Carson Creek tributaries of said river. Said claim being marked out and designated by written notices posted at each extremity of said line and at a certain point intermediate, bearing date of the day the same was posted and made public, to-wit: Twentieth Day of October, 1850.

Directors: William Hance, Jr.; Jeremiah Austill, vice-president; James Broome Smith, secretary; William Rove, treasurer; Duncan W. Murphys, James E. Nott, A. Morgan. Recorded in minutes of County Court and Mining Claims, April 2, 1851, page 25.

News of this find and claim was printed in local newspapers but did not receive massive publicity in late 1850. The *Stockton Times* reported that the quartz on the hill was indeed rich.

Stockton Times, November 30, 1850

Last week we were made aware that fresh discoveries of metaliferous quartz had been made in the immediate vicinity of Carson's Creek in Calaveras county; and on Tuesday last, at the office of F. Marriott & Co., mining agents in San Francisco, a specimen of the vein was exhibited to us... Prof. Shepherd states

that this is the richest specimen he has yet seen in California.

The winter of 1850-51 passed by quickly and relatively quietly. The Carson Creek Consolidated Mining Company, which came to be referred to as the Morgan Company, after the founder, Alfred Morgan, worked the claim as best they could. Later this group would employ large numbers of Mexicans to work the claim. In late 1850 and early 1851, however, bitterness over the Foreign Miner's Tax and a rash of racially-motivated crises in the Southern Mines, made such an interaction between these group unlikely. the influx of Mexicans to the area probably came with the general return of the Mexican miners after California's governor, John McDougal vetoed the tax.

From April, 1851, the Carson's area experienced the kind of "rush," a panic movement of gold seekers, for which California of that period is justifiably famous. The "find" was first mentioned in the *Alta California* on April 25, 1851:

From Carson's Creek - For the past few days a vague and undefined rumor has been in circulation in town, which we cannot trace to any reliable authority, that an extraordinary discovery of gold has been made in the above locality. Rumor says that as high as \$200,000 has been taken out and that the vein still leads into the rock without any diminution of its size or quality. The lead is described as being six inches in thickness of pure gold.

The *San Joaquin Republican* confirmed the euphoria which the Carson's Creek find generated:

*San Joaquin Republican
May 21, 1851*

The recent news from Carson's Creek of the extraordinary discoveries which have been made in that neighborhood, has had the effect of bewildering those who have been accustomed to reduce to rule and theorize on the causes and prospective value of the mineral deposits of California. Their theories are proven to be mere casuistry (?) and their speculations as to the

origin of the golden stores mere myths. We confess that, accustomed as we have become to the marvellous stories of the mining region, we are utterly confounded by the late reports, which, if they are to be relied upon (and there is not the least reason to doubt them,) have opened new prospects to the miners, and wealth and rapture to the State... We are told that at Carson's Creek metaliferous quartz is found in huge masses, which are so rich that the gold is readily extricated from the mass by beating it with a hammer. These diggings have long borne a good reputation amongst miners for their richness; but we have never heard of deposits being found there more bountiful than in the neighboring gulches... Carson's Creek, at the present time, is thronged with a busy and useful population, who have been allured to the spot by the extraordinary rumors which have been in circulation, and, who, we are happy to learn, are prospering.

The *Sonora Herald* of May, 1851, also repeated this rumor, and for the first time, indicated that a portion of the diggings at Carson Creek were referred to as Melones, or Maloney's.

*Sonora Herald
May 24, 1851*

Carson's Creek--There have been rumors in town for the last few days sufficient to startle the imagination even of Baron Munchausen, of the extraordinary deposits of gold just discovered at Carson's Creek, and at Maloney's diggings.

Throughout the remainder of 1851, there are numerous references to the great rush to this locality, variously referred to as Carson's, Carson's Creek, Melones, Maloney's, or occasionally, Carson Hill. To understand how so many names could be applied to the same phenomenon, one must re-emphasize the indefinite nature of mining camps in terms of space, time, and nomenclature. The camp, Melones, probably existed for less than a year. There was not time for it to become institutionalized, as to its physical boundaries or time. Doubtless the camp spilled over much of the hillside in a rather



CARSON HILL

A view of the town at Carson Flat about 1920, from a photograph taken by Louis Jensen from the north slope of

Carson Hill, looking up the road in Angels Camp.

Courtesy of L.H. Haigh

haphazard fashion. Doubtless, many individuals referred to it by several names. It was probably sufficiently close to the old Carson's Creek settlement that it was sometimes simply called by the other camp's name. When writers referred to it as Melones, there was little incentive to standardize that spelling. Sometimes the name is spelled in several ways in the same article. Nor was it clear whether the camp was Melones, Maloney's Diggings, Meloney's Camp, or a number of variations. The type of confusion in nomenclature was universal in the early mining camps of California. A prime example would be in nearby Murphys.

But all locations in the Carson Creek area with a name similar to Melones *are one and the same*. To illustrate this point, consider the following renditions of the same news story from the place. The occasion was a violent altercation between Mexican and Americans at Melones on Thursday, June 12, 1851. The *Daily Alta California*, June 16, 1851, quoting from two separate newspapers, presented two versions of the incident, one said to occur at Meloney's Diggings, the other at Carson's Creek.

Daily Alta California
June 18, 1851

Terrible affray at Meloney's Diggings. A terrible affray took place at Meloney's Diggings, on Thursday evening last, in which one or two Americans and three or four Mexicans were killed, and a number mortally wounded. The fight commenced about two women in a gambling saloon. The Mexicans drove the Americans from the house, and the latter in turn drove off the former and gained possession. The melee became general and an express was started for Angel's Camp for assistance. About 100 persons came up and order was partially restored. We have heard several accounts of the excitement, but owing to their conflicting nature we forbear giving them.

Daily Alta California
June 16, 1851 [same issue as above.]

We learn that a fracas occurred at Carson's Creek on Thursday last, which resulted in one man being killed, and three or four wounded. We are informed that a Capt. Acklin was severely, and Mr. Rancey slightly wounded.

The same issue of the *Daily Alta California* also had a report of a new quartz discovery referring to *Camp Melone*, clearly the same place. This place, incidentally, should silence those skeptics who doubt the Spanish origin of the word Melones, and *establish once and for all that it is derived from the Spanish word for melons, meaning musk melon.*

Daily Alta California
June 16, 1851

An exceedingly rich vein of gold-bearing quartz has been discovered on the mountain running up from Wood's Creek, back of Saw Mill Flats, 3 miles from Sonora... This vein is already a rival of the celebrated vein at Carson's and is even attracting persons from Camp Melone. As the latter word is the name for musk-melon, our Spanish neighbors have baptized the camp Sandias - the Castilian name for Melone's brother - that is to say, water melon.

Two days later, the *Daily Alta California* reprinted a lengthy letter in the *Stockton Journal*, explaining the details of the June 12 altercation at Melones. Notice that this writer explains that some Mexicans preferred a proper saint's name for the town, *Santa Cruz*, doubtless explaining the origin of the famous *Santa Cruz* mine on Carson Hill.

Quotes from Journal [Stockton]
Carson Hill, June 13, 1851

Dear Journal: I arrived at this scene of excitement in relation to quartz mining, in time to be near, but unfortunately not present, at a scene of real excitement, and of a more deadly character in its results. After we arrived here on Thursday evening, a fracas occurred in the town at the base of the hill, between two Mexican women. They were mistresses, one of an American sporting man and the other of a Mexican. The American told his mistress to put a rock in her handkerchief and hit the other woman, and while she so assaulted her, he held the other by the arms. A fight then occurred between the American gambler and the Mexican, which after a while was quieted. An hour had hardly elapsed before a fracas again occurred, between a Mexican and an American, and at this time the fight became general. It appears that the Mexicans had prepared themselves for a contest, as soon as it had commenced they shouted, 'kill all the Americans.' Capt. Wm. M. Acklin, of Alabama, tried to make peace between them, and he was attacked; at the moment of assault a number of Mexicans cried out not to kill the Captain, but a Mexican ran him through the body with a Hay Knife. The fight now became general, the Americans fighting in self-defence. The war-cry of the Mexican party was 'death to all Americans.' Mr. Wm. Owens of our city had just arrived in town, and when the row commenced he conducted a sick friend out to some place of safety. When he again made his appearance, the Mexicans shouted, 'kill the curly headed man,' and a shower of balls were fired at him, but fortunately missed him. He drew his pistol and fired three shots which no doubt did fatal execution. These were all the charges he had in his pistol, having fired the others at a rabbit on the road up. After exhausting his battery, Billy beat a retreat, and about this time all the Americans were taking to cover. They soon rallied, however, and then it was the Mexicans' turn to vamos.

While this fracas was going on in one part of town a Mexican cut upen a tent and attacked a woman who had deserted him because of his abusive treatment. He cut her in the face and stabbed her through the arm, but before he could complete his murder her cries frightened him out of the tent.

The keeper of a monte table lost his bank, about \$1200, during the principal row. Another man had his trunk and watch stolen.

Col. Acklin was the only American injured in the melee and he, it is thought...cannot survive. One Mexican has died of his wounds, and two others, it is thought, will also die, who received wounds in the affray. This morning, early, a number of Americans started out in pursuit of the Mexicans who were engaged in the attack.

The peaceable Mexicans of the town say that the attacking party of last night were a band of robbers, who commenced the affray for the purpose of plunder. Many of the former, some say to the number of eight hundred, anticipating a recurrence of the scenes last night, started to-day for Sonora.

P.S. - Night - Intelligence has just been sent up from the town requesting one of the company here to go down. The messenger says that a Mexican has been shot down in the street, and that it is feared the Americans will make an indiscriminate attack upon the Mexicans.

Morning - The night passed off quietly - there was no fight. Reany, with whom the row commenced, has left with his woman for Stockton, and it is believed that there will from this henceforth be quiet in Santa Cruz, which is the refined name of

this town. Melones is the more common cognomen of this quartz town.

William Perkins described this same event in his famous Journal. He calls the town "Melones," but put the word in quotes, indicating perhaps that this nomenclature was not universally recognized.

Dale L. Morgan and James R. Scobie (eds.), *William Perkins' Journal* (Berkeley, 1961)

P. 221. JUNE THIRTEENTH (1851) A fearful row took place at 'Melones' last night. Two men, an American and a Mexican, quarreled about their women, who had a small private fight on their own account. In separating the men came in contact, and, after some words, the Mexican made a pass at the other with his knife or small sword. The row, thus commenced became general; the first thing done by the Mexicans was to steal as many revolvers from the belts of Americans as possible. By this means they got possession of five Colt's pistols, and with these they fired volley after volley, and drove all the Americans, many severely wounded, out of the house.

The latter soon returned with enforcements and arms, and a bloody fight commenced, which terminated in the defeat of the Mexicans (there were also Chilenos), with three of their party killed and almost all wounded. I believe no American was killed, although three are badly wounded. Some of them I have just seen with three, four and five bullet holes in their clothes.

The Mexican who commenced the attack received three bullets in his body, and was then pinned to the dirt floor with his own sword, and in this position kept yelling 'Mata, Mata a los C—Yengis. Kill kill the d-d Yankees.' until he was knocked in the head and silenced for ever.

Joseph Henry Bachman, whose journal was partially reprinted in the *California Historical Society Quarterly*, recounted this same event, saying that it took place in "Carsons (or Melona)."

Joseph Henry Bachman, "Diary of a Used-Up Miner," (edited by Jeanne Skinner Van Nostrand), *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. XXII, No. 1, 1943, pp. 67-83.

P. 77. "Saturday (June) 14th (1851) In company with Lee and two others walked to Angel's after dinner to Carsons (or Melona) as the place is now called to see the Quartz operations — They have just had a row with some Mexican Guerrillas and gamblers — three or four killed and several wounded — many of the Americans have left — They expect another fight to night as we are very well armed urged us to stay — We return to Angels in the evening promising to be on hand with a large party from that camp if wanted

Sunday 15th All quiet at Melonas We return home bringing half a dozen Angels boys with us.

fn P. 83. Melones and Robinson's Ferry are given as one location by some authorities, while others locate the ferry two miles east of town. Melones was on the slope of Carson Hill.

Finally, Capt. Leonard Noyes, whose diary can be found in typescript form in the Calaveras County Heritage Council, recalled this same event, occurring in the town of Melone.

Diary of Capt. Leonard Noyes

Soon after we bought the Block & Tackle claim, a crowd from San Francisco came up, and pitched all the Mexicans from the Morgan Claim and took possession of it. Before this the whole

hill was worked by Mexicans hired on shares and a Town called Melone was started on the opposit side of the Hill from Carsons (taking its name from the fact of the gold found in Carson Creek was in the shape of Mellon seeds). This place called Melones was built of Brush streets say 10 feet wide lined on each side with these Brush houses where Gambling was carried on at an enormous extent, all the Mexicans having money. It was supposed that they stole more gold than they accounted for to Morgan & Co. I dont think there was ever in the Mines so wicked a crowd. Some are killed every night, shooting and cutting all the time. Our Cabbin was the opposite side of the hill some 2 miles from Malones. We would usually go there Sunday nights in a bodey keeping together so as to be able to protect each other. I always felt when in those narrow streets that I was liable to have a knife shoved into me at any moment. One night we were called out by some one and told that the Mexicans had rose in Malones and were murdering the Americans, we all got up strapped on our pistols took our rifles and went down where we found there had been a row between Mexicans and American Gamblers, which had originated by a Mexican woman striking another Mexican woman over the head with a handkerchief full of money, this was the occasion of several men being shot and cut. When we learned that it was between Mexicans and Gamblers, we concluded that it was best to let them fight it over, and no matter which got the worst of it. So we stopped on the side hill above the town soon after a Melitary companey of some 50 from Angels under the command of Capt Thomas J. Matterson marched up to us, we informed them what was up, and they turned around saying d—d they let them fight. and we don't care a d—who whips - they went back. (This was typed with all misspelled words and errors intact.)

(1851. In possession of Calaveras County Heritage Council, borrowed from Essex Institute, Salem, Massachusetts)

Noyes offers some clue as to its social character, referring to Melones as one of the most "wicked" and seemingly one of the most violent camps in California. He also indicates that its population was chiefly composed of Mexican day-laborers, working at the Morgan Claim. He refers to it as a "brush" town, with houses made of brush in a manner common to Mexican adobes in the gold country.

A Lasey, whose "Reminiscences" are stored in manuscript form in the Bancroft Library, described Melones similarly:

"Malones was a brush town occupied mainly by Mexican miners, situated on the south side of the ridge. There was trouble in the camp, two different parties claiming the ground on which the quartz had been found and all adjoining ground from the summit of the ridge on both sides, down to the flat and Stanislaus river had been located and was claimed by different parties from Angels camp, Murphies, Valecity, and other places. Altogether it was a lively camp and serious trouble was hourly "expected."

These three characteristics — the transitory "Camp" atmosphere, the predominantly Mexican populace, and the violence — are remarked on by many observers. J. Ross Browne, who did not personally visit the town, repeats the assessment of others, perhaps Thomas Deare, whom he cites as having "lived at the mine longer than other person."

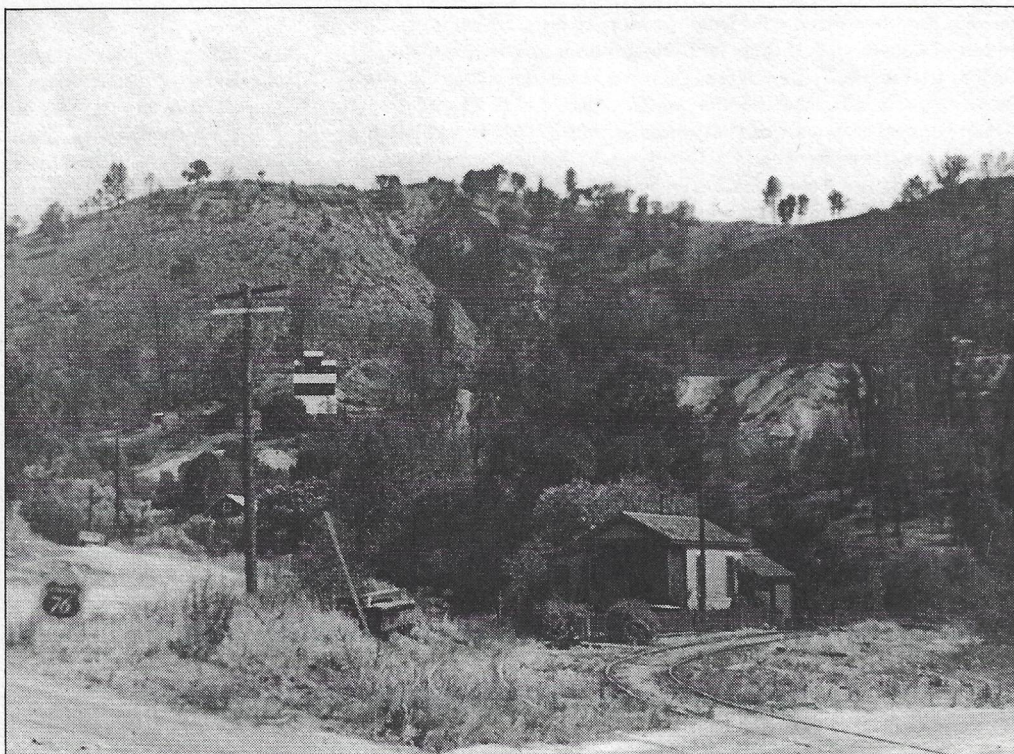
...The town of Melones, on the southern side of the hill, became the largest mining camp in the State, with a population variously estimated from 3,000 to 5,000.

People came in crowds to see the mine. Robinson's ferry, on the Stanislaus river, two miles south of the place, took in

CARSON HILL

This photograph, by Louis Jensen about 1920, was taken from the town, looking south up onto the hill. The railroad station is in the center, with the ore-loading ramp on the spur at the left. The Finnegan mill, the old open cut and the waste dumps may also be seen. This view was taken before the more extensive open-pitting operations in the thirties.

Courtesy of L.H.Haigh



\$10,000 for ferriage in six weeks. From February, 1850, til December, 1851, the production continued uninterrupted and with very little decline. In that time, according to Thomas Deare, who has lived at the mine longer than any other person, \$2,800,000 were extracted and immense sums were stolen. It is reported of one Mexican miner that he stole \$1,500 in one day from the arrastra which he had in charge, and paid it the next day for a horse. All the rock too poor for the hand mortar was ground in arrastras, and it is said that 50 of them were running at one time. The facilities for stealing were great and the temptation strong. Gambling was carried to a great extent and gold seemed to have lost its value. The miners were mostly Mexicans, who, as a class, were not looked upon with much favor by American miners; but they had had some experience in this kind of mining and their services were indispensable. They could pick up the lumps of gold in the mine, or they could take handfulls of amalgam from the arrastra with little fear of detection. As for the amount taken in this way, it could never be ascertained, but that it was great was assumed in the common conversation of the miners themselves.

Rossiter Raymond, in his report of 1872, included a brief segment of a diary of a Mexican priest in Sonora, dealing with racial violence in Melones.

Raymond, Rossiter W., "Statistics of Mines and Mining in the States and Territories West of the Rocky Mountains," H.D. No. 211, 42nd Congress, 1872.

Quoting "a work on California, published in the city of Mexico in 1866, by l'Abbe Alric, who was the parish priest of Sonora from 1851 to 1855."

June 9, 1851

Long discourse on racial tensions in the mines. "These scenes were repeated daily. In fact, on the next day I was sent for from Melones [now Carson Hill] to confess two miners accused of rob-

bing a sluice-box. It was necessary to cross the Stanislaus River, where I was detained for some time, and on my arrival found I was too late; the only thing to be seen was two corpses swinging from a limb projecting over a precipice.'

The *Daily Alta California* of June 20, 1851, reports another lynch law incident in Melones.

*Daily Alta California, June 20, 1851
(In Republican, June 18, 1851)*

Lynch Law at Melones - We are informed by Mr. W. Owens, who arrived last evening from Melones, that a great excitement existed in that neighborhood, in consequence of an attempted robbery of a Chinaman. It appears that on Monday night last, as the Chinaman was sleeping in his tent, three men entered and attacked to the purpose of robbing him. He immediately gave an alarm, and the rascals were caught in the act. One of them was immediately strung up, and was kept suspended some minutes, but was taken down befor strangulation could take place. Another was arrested on the following morning and received one hundred lashes on his bare back. The third has not yet been caught.

The location of the town should really be established using a contemporary map. We must recognize, however, that it is extremely unlikely that a camp or town with a life span of about a year would have appeared on a map, partly since its existence predated official surveys of the area by several decades. The town does not appear on any maps in the Carl L. wheat collection at the Bancroft Library. It does appear on Twentieth Century maps attempting to locate the towns. The problem of these maps will be discussed below.

The newspapers, diaries, and reminiscences of eyewitnesses give a reasonable approximation of the town's location. We know at the outset that the town was in the general vicinity of Carson Hill. There is logical reason to suspect that it was near Carson Creek, given the simple daily necessities of its residents. We can logically presume fur-

ther that the town was not far from the Morgan mine which is near the summit of Carson Hill. If these basic assumptions are true, and they fit every available piece of evidence, then we can deduce that the town was somewhere near the junction of Sections 13, 14, 23 and 24, of T2NR13E, probably west of that common point. This would put the town about halfway between Carson Flat, which is the present village of Carson Hill, and Robinson's Ferry on the Stanislaus River. We can further assume that the town was near a major transportation route. There were, of course, no "major" routes through California in 1851. The historical record indicates that the town was not on the way to McLean Ferry, the best-travelled route from Calaveras to Tuolumne counties, but rather was on a straight line between Angels Camp, Carson Flat, and Robinson's Ferry, the route of present-day Highway 49 [until the building of the Archie Stevenot bridge over the Stanislaus River in the mid 1970's].

A. Lascy described the road through Calaveras County as follows:

A. Lascy, "Reminiscences" (1924)

Bundle 4, p. 2

Double Springs was located at head of a gulch on a level piece of ground, at the fork of the main trail from Stockton to the Southern mines. One Fork running easterly to Mokelumne Hill the other southerly passing by San Andreas and crossing several affluents of the Calaveras to Angels Camp, Carson Flat, and Malones.

So popular was travel to the Melones area during the year of 1851 that Todd & Co., the principal stage line in the Southern Mines, arranged a special express from Stockton to Melones and back again. An advertisement for this line, appearing in the *San Joaquin Republican* of September, 1851, described it in the following terms:

September 13, 1851

Advertisement: Todd & Co. Daily line of stages carrying Todd & Co. express. A stage will leave the express office of Todd & Co. EVERY MORNING on the arrival of the San Francisco Boats, for Carson Creek and Malones Diggings via Double Springs, Calaveras, and Angel's Camp, arriving in Malones Digging by daylight.

Returning will leave Malones at 6 o'clock A.M. DAILY, arriving in Stockton in time for the San Francisco Boats, forming a Daily Line between Carson Creek and San Francisco in twenty-four hours.

Reynolds & Co., an express company serving the Southern mines, also advertised its service to Melones.

San Joaquin Republican

September 17, 1851

Advertisement: Reynolds & Co. A Daily Express between Stockton, Double Springs, Angel's Camp, Carson's Creek, and Melones.

A. Lascy apparently took the Todd & Co. stage from Stockton to Melones, and left an invaluable description of the route.

A. Lascy, "Reminiscences"

Bundle 4, p. 6

All the mining mentioned in this and former sketches has been placer mining, but within the last few months we had heard stories of immense riches of pure gold found in the Quartz lodes at Angels Camp. Carson Flat and particularly at Melones, on the hill at Carson Flat. So my partner and myself after a short visit to San Francisco concluded to go up to Carsons and Malones and see for ourselves if the reports we had heard were true. One fine morning in September found us in Stockton ready to go once more to Calaveras. A stage coach, drawn by four live-

ly mustangs, owned by a man named Foreman left Stockton at 6 o'clock A.M. passing through Double Springs, changing horses at different stations. Following the road described at the location of the county seat brought us towards evening to Angels Camp, a lively camp, from where we went to Carson Flat and stopped at the Lake House, a hotel and store kept by a man of the same name. The hotel was about in the center of the flat, further down on the bank of Carson Creek was a store and lodging house kept by one Gregory and Baker. South of the flat rose the ridge on the summit of which the rich Quartz had been found.

For reasons described at length below, the Carson Hill quartz operations shut down in early 1852, and the town of Melones, economically dependent upon those operations, withered and died. Fortunately, several writers pass through the remnants of the town in the next few years, and left invaluable records of where the town had been and what it had looked like.

The June 4, 1852 edition of *The Pacific*, a San Francisco magazine, delivered a kind of post-mortem for Carson Hill mining and the town of Melones.

The Pacific

Vol. 1, No. 42, P. 166, C. 4; June 4, 1852

J.W. Douglas, Ed. & Prop., San Francisco

Editorial Correspondence.

Carson's Hill is two miles North of the Stanislaus River. Its summit is crowned with naked quartz rocks, in which numerous quartz veins coming from different direction appear to meet. At this point a discovery of gold was made sometime in 1850, by a single individual who for many months kept it profound secret to himself. A company however, was organized in the fall of that year, including the discovery of his friends, who took possession of the summit of the hill and commenced laying open its hidden treasures. The gold came out at first in such masses, and appeared so inexhaustible that Carson's Hill became for a time more famous than any other spot in California. Agents were to be dispatched to Europe, to sell at enormous rates part of the company's stock. We saw one at that time who expected to go on this mission. He was all smiles and enthusiasm, as with the golden specimens in his hands, he thought of the tour of Europe and the fame and fortune to be realized—and all to be crowned with the blessings of a wife and home in some snug cottage on the Atlantic side, Ah! his dreams were but illusions, and those of many others too. Many confidently believed at that time that the great Mother Mountain of Gold had been found at last. A multitude of people was drawn hither by the excitement. They were scattered along the ridge and sides of the hill, running shafts into the rock in search of some golden vein. At night they formed a large encampment nearby where the prospects of the day were talked over, and mirth and revelry ran high. That encampment, called by the Spaniards, Melones, is now silent and deserted. One old Mexican is found there watching the barley that has sprung up from last year's waste in horse lots that then were worth thousands of dollars each. The multitude has gone. Hardly one is left to tell of the days and nights that were. We walked on the hill with Mr. Gordon, a gentleman interested in quartz mining. That evidence were seen of labor and capital wasted here in pursuit of gold. The hill in some parts is like a honey comb, so pierced has it been by sunken shafts. The original company, Morgan & Co., undoubtedly took out a very large amount of gold; but whether their first successful adventure, any has been extracted in quantities sufficient to pay expenses, is very doubtful. Morgan & Co. suspended their opera-

tions some time since, and have sold out their interest in the mine, as is reported, to some English capitalists, who are now waiting to be put in possession of it. In the meantime two other companies are now at work in this claim, whom Morgan & Co. are endeavoring to eject by process of law. Against one of them they have already obtained decision in the district Court at Stockton, but the mandate of the court is unheeded. the other case remains yet to be tried. We enter some 70 feet through the solid rock by tunnel, now worked by one of these companies, or rather worked by some Mexicans for them on shares. They follow on the quartz vein down, right and left, but the gold symptoms appeared to us to be very small. The view from the top of Carson's Hill in uncommonly fine, embracing a wide stretch of rolling mountain, within glimpse of the San Joaquin Valley and the Coast Range beyond; while to the North turns up the Butte, marking the site of Mokolunne Hill.

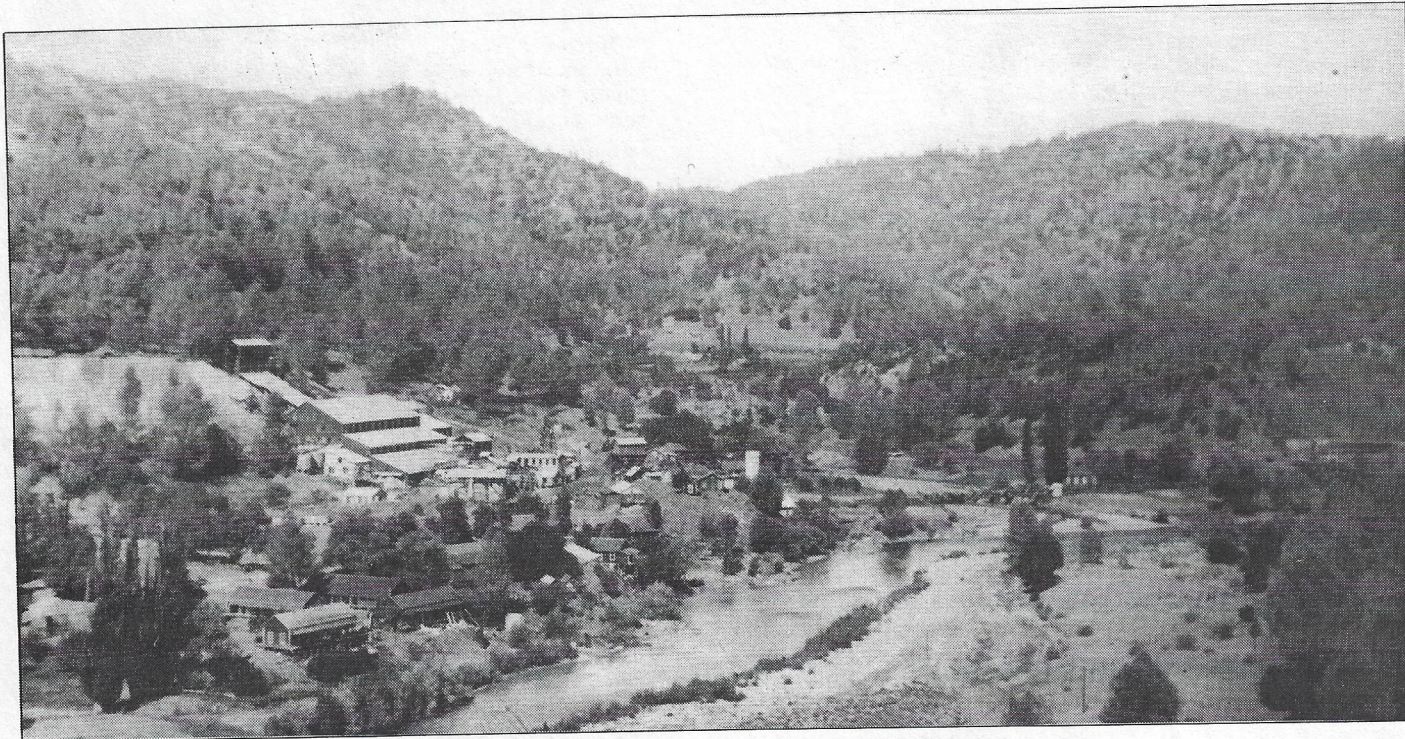
Almost exactly one year later, the *San Joaquin Republican* sent a reporter through the Southern mines. He too remarked upon the desolation where once the town of Melones had stood.

San Joaquin Republican, June 11, 1853
 Leaving from Tuttletown. From thence to McLean's Ferry there is nothing of note except a right smart chance of a bill to go down. Capt. McLean is one of the few who are left in our midst, who prospected through our hills and ravines before the swarms of 1849, poured into them, and many are the tales he will tell of gold hunting when it was new. He has a fine two story house and he lives like a lord. There is some mining done just below, upon the river, but nothing very extensive. After going over the

bill we come upon the ancient site of Maloney's. 'Ob! What a fall is here, countrymen.' There, at one time, were congregated some three hundred souls, drawn to the spot by the discovery of a rich quartz lead upon the top of a hill near by. While now nothing remains except a few shanties inhabited by a few Mexicans; but the gulches are not worked out, these hill-sides will pay to sluice, and I would not be at all surprised to see within a few years a thrifty place spring up in this vicinity. As we crossed the hill we saw the ruins of many ancient cabins and found we were upon Carson's Creek, first discovered by James H. Carson, who has been upon this creek while the different systems of mining have passed under his observation.
 [See map by C.D. Gibbs, 1852.]

Note that this reporter crossed the river at McLean's, not Robinson Ferry. In this case, he would have ascended the hill in a westerly direction, as opposed to the generally northerly direction of Highway 49. [Both routes were quite circuitous.] He wanders through the ruins of Melones some time before he discovers that he is upon Carson Creek. This could tend to indicate that Melones was downstream along the creek from Carson Flat, where the creek is readily visible for some distance, into the ravine which the creek cut, where it is all but invisible until one is practically upon it. But the town would also likely be upstream from the point where Carson Creek winds away from the slope of Carson Hill, out of view of Highway 49. This would seem to indicate that the town began along the creek, probably above the series of waterfalls that make it virtually inaccessible from the south, and stretched out along the southern slope of Carson Hill.

The abrupt halt in quartz mining on Carson Hill was the direct cause of the abrupt decline of the town of Melones. The incident



MELONES - EARLY 1900'S

A view of the large mill of the Melones Mining Company to treat the ore trammed out of the long river tunnel under Carson Hill. From a photograph by Louis Jensen, taken

shortly after the name of the town was changed from Robinson's Ferry to Melones.

Courtesy of L.H. Haigh

leading to the cession of Carson Hill mining is one of the favorite stories of Gold Rush chronicles and, on the basis of primary evidence, one that is subject to a great deal of misinformation. This record deserves to be straightened out.

There is general agreement in the documents that the rich quartz vein atop Carson hill was discovered by William Hance, Jr. There is a critical disagreement, however, over who was with Hance at this time. In the thick of the battle over ownership of the claim in December, 1851, a resident of Carson's Creek wrote to the editors of the *Daily Alta California*, asserting that a James Finegan [or Finnagan] had accompanied Hance. This writer asserted that Finegan had left the area to seek financing for the mine and that Hance, on Finegan's absence, had organized the Carson's Creek Consolidated Mining Company sans Finegan.

Alta California, December 24, 1851

Sirs: On this subject I know one Hance, who, together with two other persons, discovered in 1849, the quartz mine on Carson's Hill, and worked it jointly for eighteen successive days, when at the suggestion of Hance, Finegan, one of the three, went to the states with a view to effect arrangements to bring out machinery to work the mine with, and much to his [F's] disadvantage, while absent, Hance with the cunning of a fox gets Morgan & Co., capitalists, in connection with him, and works the mines contrary to all arrangements with the other partners, takes out of the same the enormous amount of near one million of dollars. Hance, on the first news of Finegan's return, pockets a large share of the amount taken out and clears for home, and at last accounts he started for London and Paris, where it is likely his ill got lucre will vanish, as all obtained by fraud is sure to do.

This story is repeated by H.H Bancroft, as are of two equally plausible accounts of the occurrences.

...Hance and Finnegan owned a rich quartz claim, discovered in 1849, on Carson hill. Needing machinery, Finnegan went east to purchase it, and was gone about two years. On his return, he learned to his astonishment that Hance had sold the claim to Morgan and Company, and had absconded with the proceeds. Finnegan's mind was troubled yet more when informed that the claim had yielded over a million of dollars. December of 1851 saw the Hill the centre of great commotion. tearfully Finnegan besought the miners' aid;...

Bancroft's alternate version of this story is simply that Hance and Morgan made the discovery without Finnegan's presence. The discrepancy involves Finnegan's right to all or part of the Morgan claim.

It is known for certain that a claim was filed by Morgan, Hance, and five other men- James Smith, William Rove, Duncan Murphys, and James E. Nott, on behalf of the Carson Creek Consolidated Mining company, claiming 1700 feet along the vein, on November 15, 1850. The real work on the claim awaited Spring, 1851. In the chaos of the rush to Melones, thousands of people worked claims in and around the Morgan claim. The exact location of the various claims was probably uncertain. One might surmise that Morgan & co. were disinclined to enforce the full boundaries of their claim as long as the diggings were generally productive and the number of squatters large.

In fall, 1851, however, mining operations slowed because of the lack of water. The mining population thinned out. Simultaneously, the miners of the Carson's district decided in open meeting that the Morgan claim of 1700 feet was unjustified. Meeting in August, 1851, a miners convention at Carson's Creek voted to reduce the size of the Morgan claim. Finnegan was an active participant in this move, in-

dicating that the miners' action may have been motivated by a sense of outrage. These miners took their case before a county judge in Murphys, Judge Putney, who upheld their right to make such a decision, and upheld the decision itself.

Apparently the miners at this time took possession of the disputed portion of the Morgan claim. Morgan at this point appealed the case to the County Court and before a different advocate Judge Smith, received a favorable ruling. On December 14, 1851, the sheriff of Calaveras County cleared other miners from the Morgan claim and returned it to Morgan & Co.

Immediately the miners banded together and retook the hill, leaving the situation at a standoff, one laden with violent potential. The *San Joaquin Republican* described these events as follows:

December 20, 1851

The details of the important difficulty which has arisen on Carson Hill are in the shape of resolutions passed by the miners, and an address written by Alfred Morgan & Co. It appears that said Morgan & Co. (Col. Hays being a member,) located a quartz claim on the hill in October, 1850, the extent claimed was one thousand feet; that they worked the claim uninterruptedly nine months; that the precious metal was found in immense quantities; and in August, 1851, the miners of Carson Creek and its neighborhood held a convention at which they passed a resolution reducing the extent of Morgan & Co.'s and other quartz claims. From this moment the dispute alluded to commenced. Morgan & Co. resolved to maintain their claim to one thousand feet, and the miners resolved that they would not allow so large an area, and were determined to carry out the resolution they had passed. The cause (sic) was tried before Judge Putney, at Murphy's, and there the decision was adverse to the interests of A. Morgan & Co.

An appeal was taken, and the case was again argued in the County Court, before Judge Smith, who reversed the decision of Judge Putney. Notwithstanding this, however, the disaffected parties of Carson's creek and hill resolved that inasmuch as the late decision was contrary to the law they had passed in August, they would oppose force to the demands of Morgan & Co. The Sheriff of Calaveras County, on Tuesday last gave possession of the claim to Morgan & Co., but the same night a number of miners again forcibly took possession of it, and on Thursday 200 persons, well armed, headed by Finnegan, Vanderslice, Laing, and others gave Morgan & Co. one hour's notice to quit the premises. Morgan & Co. left, and the other took possession.

The threat of violence began when miners took possession of the hill following Judge Putney's decision. Morgan & Co., at least in the recollection of the opposing side, threatened the miners with violence. The Miner's Convention responded to these threats with a decision that the company personnel were a "nuisance and a pest" to the community. The Morgan Company was given one hour to leave. The resolution read as follows:

Daily Alta California

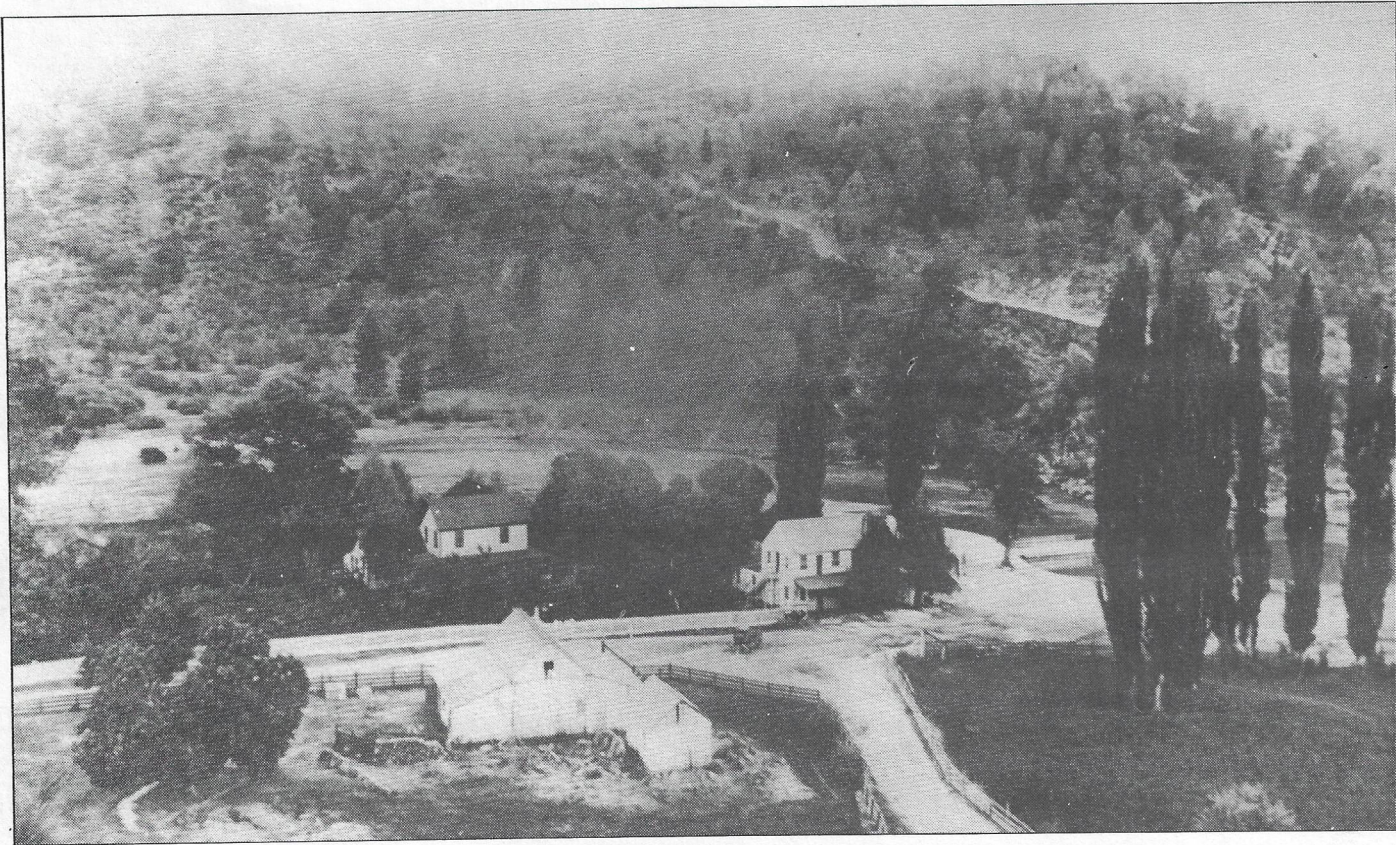
December 23, 1851

Published resolution of Carson Hill miners, Dec. 12, 1851

Resolved, That the rules and regulations passed in August last, governing the quartz mines on Carsons Hill, be the only laws which this meeting do recognize.

Resolved, That forasmuch as the lives of the miners working on Carson's Hill have been threatened by Alfred Morgan and Company, we consider him and them as disturbers of the public peace, acting in violation of the laws of said Hill, and are therefore a nuisance and a pest in the said community.

Resolved, That the sense of this meeting being that we cannot



ROBINSON'S FERRY

ensure peace and quietness to this community while said Morgan and others reside in this camp, and that Morgan and his aiders and abettors, be requested to leave within one hour after being notified of this resolution.

Resolved, That if the said Morgan and company refuse to leave within the time specified, that a committee of the whole shall, be peaceably as may be, eject them out of this camp.

Resolved, That all the property belonging to the said Morgan and company, in their cabin on Carson's Hill, be held sacred.

Wm. Laing, Chairman
Robert Packard, Secretary

December 12, 1851

After recapturing the hill on December 14, 1851, the miners' convention resolved to oppose with force any further attempts of the county to enforce Judge Smith's ruling. This resolution read as follows:

Daily Alta California

December 23, 1851

Carson's Hill miners' resolution of December 14, 1851, after County Court decided against them.

Resolved, That this meeting feels justly indignant at the late attempt of Judge Smith to eject the quartz miners, now holding peaceable possession of their claims on Carson's Hill, and that this meeting emphatically condemn such unconstitutional interference with their rights, and hereby pledge themselves not to recognize any suits that may be instituted in future to dispossess men of their rights and privileges secured to them by the miners' laws of this Company; and that a copy of this resolution be forwarded forthwith to Judge Smith.

Dr. H. Vanderslyde, Chairman

H. Packard, Secretary

December 14, 1851

The two sides for a time fought the case in the newspapers. The *Daily Alta California* of December, 1851, and January, 1851, is filled with letters from both sides. One letter, sympathetic to the non-Morgan interests, read:

Daily Alta California
January 2, 1852

Carson's Creek,
December 30, 1851

To the Editors of the *Alta California*—Gentlemen:

Observing a letter in yours of date of 24th, relative to the excitement on Carson's Hill, and the People's Mining Co.'s right to the mine in dispute, other companies are anxious that it should be known that they have never been troubled with lawsuits, or writs or ejectments, but have peaceably held possession of their claims for the last six months. Morgan then tried to drive off every company, without distinction, and thus has arisen all the disputes and difficulties with the miners. This arbitrary and outrageous conduct has aroused their indignation, and they are determined to reject all further encroachments on their rights. The justness of their claims has never been tested by a jury of miners, in accordance with miners' law; or by any other court; but they were summarily ejected by a peremptory order from Morgan personally, accompanied with threats of violence, if they did not comply. Is this in accordance with justice, or the 'law and order' so much preached up by the sympathizers of Morgan & Co.? We indignantly deny that we are any more 'squatters and foreigners' than Morgan & Co., but are law-abiding citizens, anxious to uphold and obey the laws.

The Members Composing the other Companies

The case slowly dissolved into a legal puzzle that was not resolved satisfactorily for more than a decade. By this time, nearly all interests originally involved had left the area. The mine had laid idle or nearly idle for this entire period.

A long article in the *Daily Alta California* of June 17, 1867 described what had transpired between 1852 and 1867 relative to the legal disposition of this mine.

Daily Alta California
June 17, 1867

The pioneer residents of California remembers the excitement caused in 1851 by the discovery of the Morgan mine, but many of the facts connected with it were never published in a connected form, and many of the statements published at the time have been partly or entirely forgotten. Carson Hill is a peak that rises 1,600 feet above the level of the Stanislaus River, on its north bank, sixty miles eastward from Stockton. Its altitudes, as well as the remarkably large outcrop of the white quartz of the mother lode forming its crest renders it a prominent landmark. At the foot of this hill in 1849, were found wonderfully rich placers, and large nuggets were especially abundant. For a time not a day passed without the finding of a lump weighing at least five pounds.

In February, 1850, a miner named Hance discovered that portion of the quartz crest was full of gold; and he took a claim there, and he formed a company with sixty others to work it. A Mr. Morgan was President and the mine was named after him. The richest deposit of quartz gold ever known was here found. In some of the shafts and inclines the men seemed to be working almost in solid gold. The metal was so abundant that the quartz was scarcely noticed. The gold could be cut out with a cold-chisel, and most of it was separated from the rock by pounding it in a mortar. One piece of metal weighed 112 pounds; and at one blast \$110,000 were thrown out. The Union Company worked the mine from February, 1850, till December, 1851, and in that time reduced 350 tons of rock in arrastras, and extracted by arrastra, mortar, hand picking, and cold-chisel, \$2,800,00. This sum was given to me by the man who is supposed to have known more about the mine than anybody else, and whose statements are credited by those who ought to know best.

Mr. Stevenot, however, who was living near at the time, and who claimed to be half owner of the mine, until he was likely defaulted in court, thinks the amount was about \$1,500,000. All authorities agree that the largest mining camp of California in 1851, was the town of Carsons, at the foot of Carson Hill, where the population was from 3,000 to 5,000, as variously estimated. So great was the myth of people to see the wonder of the time, that Robinson's Ferry, at the foot of the hill, took in \$10,000 in six weeks, as I was informed by the ferryman, and the Stanislaus, at the ferry, is not 100 feet wide.

The mine was too rich to be enjoyed in peace. A gang of several hundred ruffians, headed by Billy Mulligan, and others like him, came and drove away the owners, and worked the mine for nine months, at the end of which time they were stopped by an injunction, and seven months later they were driven away. Nobody knows how much they stole, nor was any attempt made to recover the gold, which most of them gambled away as soon as they got it. After the jumpers were expelled, Morgan went to England to sell the mine, and about the same time litigation for the property began between Stevenot and Bacigalupi on one side, and the Morgan Company on the other, and their suit was not decided until a few months since.

For 15 years this mine, which at its opening was even in the flush time of 1851, the wonder of California, has lain idle, and

work has been recommenced within a few weeks. Current rumor says that rock to the value of \$80,000 has been taken out but the Superintendent, Mr. McDonnell, to whom I am indebted for many courtesies, was decidedly reticent in regard to the subject of these rumors, and I am not prepared either to affirm or deny them. The mine is now owned by Erwin Davis, R.H. Sinton, A.A. Selover and James G. Fair, or at least it is in their possession under a judgement of the Supreme Court against all who have contested their title heretofore.

Note that this article asserts that the mine was taken from Morgan & Co., not by James Finnegan, but Billy Mulligan. Billy Mulligan was San Francisco *persona non grata* who ran afoul of the vigilance committee. He was on the mind of San Franciscans in the 1860s. There is no evidence whatsoever that he was in the Southern mines in 1851. Perhaps this *Alta* correspondent misunderstood his informant or was treated to a hoax, a pattern of misinformation for which Calaveras county, home of the Calaveras skull, is justifiably famous.

Unfortunately this bit of misinformation was passed on to later generations by the widely-acknowledge authority, J. Ross Browne. Even more unfortunately, in terms of Browne's reputation as a reliable authority, his description of the Carson Hill difficulty is lifted almost verbatim from the preceding *Daily Alta California* article. Browne's account read:

The vast production was too great to be witnessed in peace. Several hundred ruffians banded themselves together under the lead of Billy Mulligan and others of his kind and drove away the owners of the mine by force and worked it themselves. A suit to eject them was commenced, and after nine months their work was stopped by injunction, and in the spring of 1853 final judgment was rendered in favor of Morgan and his associates. Morgan then went to England to sell the mine, but more litigation sprang up about the title, and there was no final decision and very little work till the spring of 1867, the mine having lain idle for nearly 15 years. The work has lately been recommenced, and report says some marvellously rich rock has been taken out, but the superintendent did not consider himself authorized to give the precise facts for publication.

Virtually all subsequent histories have included the Billy Mulligan story. If Mulligan was there at the time, his presence was so insignificant as to go unnoticed. More likely, the Mulligan story has become a part of local mythology, an unfortunate legacy to Browne's questionable scholarship.

The 1867 *Alta* article mentions another important character in the Carson Hill story, Mr. Gabriel Stevenot. So closely is Stevenot's life history linked to the Carson Hill area and the town of Melones, in fact, that it offers strong circumstantial evidence as to the location of that town.

Stevenot arrived in the Carson Hill area in the early 1850s. Family recollections hold that it was April 2, 1850.

Archie Stevenot's recollections, p. 1

...Stevenot left for Mariposa where he heard the Indians had gold. He stopped at the ranch site on April 2, 1850 and camped on the bench (the site of the house) and the horses broke their hobbles during the night. Stevenot and one man sent after them. One may stayed and found some gold while panning some dirt to idle away the time. The party stayed...

Stevenot lived virtually the remainder of his life at the spot where he stopped in 1850, a site along Highway 49, very near the turnoff for the new Archie Stevenot bridge, and along Carson Creek, just above the waterfalls. Unfortunately there are no diaries nor official records of Stevenot's presence at this site during the period but the town of

Melones existed, that is, in the year 1851. It is known that Stevenot operated a store. His land was sufficiently distant from Carson Flat that he probably was not linked to it. Perhaps his store was a part of the commercial operations of the town of Melones.

Obviously Stevenot himself considered that his home was in or near the town of Melones. Even long after the town had died, he gave his address as "Melones", perhaps a way of indicating location by reference to a known site.

For example, in 1856, Gabriel Stevenot was delinquent in paying \$43.50 in taxes. His address was listed as "Meloney's Old Camp."

*Bancroft Scraps, Bancroft Library
(courtesy of Frances Bishop, Arnold, California)
1856 Tax Delinquency, \$43.50, Gabriel Stevenot of
'Meloney's Old Camp.'*

In 1857 Stevenot bought the Reserve mine from Thomas Miller. His address was recorded as "Melonas."

*From the Book of Deeds, Calaveras County,
Book B, P. 870.*

*Thomas Miller to Gabriel Stevenot of Melonas - sale of the
Reserved Mine.*

In 1858, Stevenot and four Mexicans - - Primas Cervantes, Macindo Robano, Pedro Rosario, and Andre Hummera - took up a quartz claim along present-day Highway 49. They described that road as "leading from Robinson's Ferry to Meloney's." Did they mention Melones, rather than, say Carson's, or Angel's Camp, to which the road also led, because they were all former residents of the old town of Melones?

Mining Claims, Book C, p. 128, 1858.

Gabriel Stevenot, Primas Cervantes, Macindo Robano, Pedro Rosario, and Andre Hummera claim 'a certain Quartz vein on lode situated in Calaveras County, California described as follows-To wit, Commencing on the road leading from Robinsons Ferry to Meloneys (about 600 yards above Robinsons Ferry). Said lode runs northwest and southwest. We claim the lode a distance of 700 feet.

Stevenot always referred to his ranch as "Melones Ranch." It is extremely unlikely that the choice of this name was mere coincidence, especially given the fact that he had previously listed his address as Melones.

In 1865, Stevenot sold his ranch to Jean Baptists Chamberiere,



ROBINSON'S FERRY

From a picture taken in the early 1900's, shortly after the Melones tunnel had been driven south under Carson Hill. The ferry building is in the center, with the Harvey Wood

home half hidden in the trees. At low water, the lower rope was used, and the upper rope when the water was higher.

Courtesy Calaveras County Museum

NEW MELONES

During the expansion of the Melones Mining Company, which included driving a mile-long tunnel from the river in under Carson Hill, and the construction of the big stamp mill at the portal, the little town of Robinson's Ferry grew considerably and its name was changed to Melones. This is how the main street along the river appeared in the 90's.

Historical Society Files



Deeds, Book M, Page 87, 1865.

Gabriel Stevenot to Jean Baptists Chamieriere, 200 acres 'known as the property of Gabriel K. Stevenot, near Carsons Creek and around it, called Melones Ranch, with all the improvements, house & etc. belonging to it.'

Then in 1866, Stevenot bought back this property. In 1868, Stevenot bought back his land from the tax collector.

Deeds, Book 2, Page 100, 1868.

B.F. Strauss (Tax Collector) to G.K. Stevenot. 'Lot of land in Angels Township...known as the Melones ranch consisting of House, Barn, outbuildings and fence and 80 acres.'

In 1883, Gabriel turned his land over to his son, Emile K. Stevenot. Emile and Gabriel were both at that time living on the ranch. The deed read:

Book 9, Page 56, G.K. Stevenot 'presently residing at Melones Camp, Carson Hill, Calaveras County.' 'All the certain piece or parcel of land situated, lying and being in Melones, County of Calaveras, State of California, and particularly bounded and described as follows to wit: known as Melones ranch situate on Carson's Creek about a half mile from Carson Flat and on the Road to Robinsons Ferry, together with all improvements thereon, consisting of a house and barns and also 80 acres of land.'

In the late 1850s and early 1860s, Stevenot bought various shares of the Point Rock mine, adjoining the Morgan claim. He re-named the mine Melones mine. We might ask, did Stevenot thus indicate that the town was near the mine he named it after?

Book Y, Page 310. U.S. Patent to Melones of Point Rock Mine. 'Gabriel K. Stevenot and William Jeffray did on the 25th Day of July, A.D. 1872 enter and pay for said mining claim or premises, being Mineral entry No. 19 in the series of said office' (Register of Land Office in Stockton.)

This is doubtful, since the mine, immediately adjacent to the Morgan mine, was subject to immense blasting and industrial activity in 1851. It is doubtful that the miners chose to live that close to the mine, but more likely lived some distance away. Stevenot's rechristening of the mine may have been a kind of memorial to his

former hometown, or it may have simply been a name he associated with.

In the early 1860s, Stevenot acquired controlling interest in a mine, variously called the Stanislaus mine, Silver mine, and Glover mine, along with a quartz mill site nearby. In 1863, he organized the Melones and Stanislaus Gold, Silver, and Copper Mining Company. This name may have referred either to the two principal mines -- the Melones and Stanislaus -- or to the fact that its various mines stretched from the Melones townsite to the Stanislaus River.

Ironically, Stevenot's attempt to preserve the name of this old town contributed to historical confusion of its identity. The Melones and Stanislaus Company was sold in 1888 to the Calaveras Consolidated Gold Mining Company. In 1895, an entirely new company combined all the mines except the Morgan, in the Carson Hill area, taken a combined form of the names of its two predecessors, calling itself the Melones Consolidated Mining Company. The following sketch of Emile Stevenot's life incorporates portions of this information.

The Bay of San Francisco: The Metropolis of the Pacific Coast and Its Suburban Cities: A History. (Chicago, 1892) Vol. I. P. 536

Emile K. Stevenot.--To the gold mines of California is due the rapid growth and development of the State, and to its efficient assayers and mining engineers should much credit be given. Among this working class of scientists ranks the subject of this sketch.

Mr. Stevenot was born in Alsace - Lorraine, France, and was educated in mining and engineering at the University at Strasbourg, where he graduated in 1863. After completing his education he came direct to California to join his father, Gabriel K. Stevenot, who is numbered with the California pioneers, the latter arrived here in August, 1849. He located and developed a rich mining section at Melones, Carson Hill, Calaveras county, and when his son arrived, in 1863, was president of Melones Mining Company. Emile K. aided in operating the mines until 1870, when he came to San Francisco and started a borax and metallurgical refinery...(In 1879) he sold out and returned to his mining interests in Calaveras county. There he located and developed valuable mines on the West Leg of the 'Mother Lode' of California. In September, 1888, sold out to Calaveras Consolidated Gold Co. (London). Lived on ranch until 1890, when he moved to Sonora County.



GABRIEL STEVENOT HOME

Built in the early 1850's, this home was located close to the original town of Melones. From a photograph taken by Emile Stevenot about 1886, showing Mrs. Stevenot and their children on the front porch.

Donated to the Museum by Cornelia Stevenot

In 1902, the Melones Mining Company, which had obtained a lease and bond on the Melones Consolidated's ground completed construction of a massive milling operation in the old town of Robinson's Ferry, on the Stanislaus River. It applied to have the post office renamed, Melones, named after the company. Since Robinson's Ferry was never incorporated, the town's name changed with that of the post office.

Historians have mistaken the old Melones with this company town. The relative obscurity of the short-lived town on the hillside helps explain this mistake.

Through the years, the remains of the old town have disappeared. Mrs. Eileen Kennedy, Emile Stevenot's granddaughter, grew up on Melones Ranch. She recalls seeing remains of structures in a field on that ranch, but recalls that they were torn up to make way for an alfalfa field. She also recalls that, according to family legend, the bulk of the town was right in front of the old Stevenot place, approximately 150 yards between the house and the road.

The town of Melones was on the southerly slope of Carson Hill, on or near Highway 49 between Carson Hill and Robinson's Ferry. It probably stretched from Carson Creek above the falls toward the summit of the hill, without reaching the summit.

There is good reason to believe that the town centered around the so-called Melones Ranch or the old Stevenot property.

The old Stevenot homestead is located approximately one-quarter of a mile north of the Archie P. Stevenot bridge. It is on the west side of Highway 49, at a major turn in the road where there is a turnout on the western side of the road from which an abandoned grove of black walnut trees may be seen. The terrain there is identified by two remarkably flat areas. The Stevenot homestead is outlined by a series of trees. A cement watering trough is in the center of one of the flats.

A ground party should search the area from the old Stevenot homestead down to the creek and up to the summit, focusing particularly on the area between Highway 49 and Carson Creek, and a smaller area on the uphill side of the highway.

It is absolutely necessary to distinguish between the town on the hillside and the river town, both of which have been called "Melones", allowing the river town to be called Robinson's Ferry until 1902 and Melones thereafter.

Various theories have been bandied about as to the origin of the

word "Melones." The most widely-held belief is that the word comes from the Spanish, *melon*, for melon, or, more specifically, musk melon. Others have claimed the word was of Irish origin, arriving from the fact that it was often misspelled Maloney's. Still others say it was derived from a name, Meloney, associated with Robinson's Ferry. Gudde summarized these various theories:

Edwin G. Gudde, California Gold Camps, University of California Press, 1975.
P. 212

The origin of the name Melones, which is still retained in the name Melones Reservoir, has not been determined. Edward Vischer in the summer of 1851 states that Carson Hill was called el cerro de Melones, (hill of Melones) and that there were several dry diggings called 'Meloncitos' by Mexicans to differentiate them from the mountain. But Vischer does not explain the reason for the naming. Archie Stevenot, who was born at Carson Hill and later was manager of the Melones Mine, claimed his grandfather, Gabriel Stevenot, gave the name for the reason that the Mexican miners referred to the flakes of gold as melones because they looked like melon seeds. It has become a generally accepted theory that Mexican miners found flakes of gold there in the shape of melon seeds. Gold flakes that resembled melon or cucumber seeds were actually found in various places in California. This does not explain why the Mexicans (or others) called a hill, or camp Melones, which is the Spanish word for melons not melon seeds. It is quite possible that the place was named for a person. See Maloneys, Meloneys. There is a Melones family in Alamo and Saratoga, California, one of whose forbears came to California mines in 1849, but there is no tangible evidence that he went to the Southern Mines, though there is a family tradition that he was connected with the camp Melones. Another indication that the place may have been named for a person is their reference to a Melone family in Orange County, Virginia. In 1817 Susan Melone married John Robinson, and the two may have moved to California some time before or during the Gold Rush. In Calaveras County, about 1848, it is thought, John W. Robinson and Stephen Mead established Robinsons Ferry at the place also known as Melones...These references do not prove that the Camp Melones was named for a person, but they at least strengthen the case.

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The Calaveras County Historical Society, a non-profit corporation, meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at the Grange Hall in San Andreas—except for dinner meetings which are held each quarter at different places in the county.

Back issues of "Las Calaveras" may be purchased from the Society at a cost of 75¢ per issue to members or \$1.00 to non-members, plus a charge of 25¢ per issue for envelope and postage if mailed. Xerox copies of out-of-print issues will be supplied at 60¢ per issue plus mailing charges. Back issues may be purchased over the counter [without mailing] at the San Andreas Museum.

Continued from p. 15

Our research indicates the the word was of Spanish origin, meaning melon. Several 1851 accounts stress this point, including the remarkable piece in the *Alta California* of June 16, 1851, which indicated that a sister camp, Sandias (watermelon), was started up across the Stanislaus River canyon.

Furthermore, these other theories have problems. The fact that some writers spelled the town, Maloney's, is no more surprising than it being spelled Melonas, Melona, or Melons. The fact that Robinson's wife was named Melone is completely irrelevant, since Robinson's Ferry was not called Melones until many years after Robinson and his wife died.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members to the
Society:

Mr. & Mrs. Phil D. Alberts, Mountain Ranch
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Barror, San Andreas
Mr. & Mrs. George F. Clark, Upper Lake
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Mr. & Mrs. Alfred Sola, Altaville
Marvin E. Taylor, Jr., Sonora
Ginelle Winchester, Altaville
Bert Zwinge, Stockton

Correspondence

Dear Editor:

I would like to correct the statement by Mr. Riggs in the July issue (page 30) that the Calaveras Copper Company shipped mill concentrates to the Selby Smelter. They were shipped to the Tacoma Smelter in Washington.

Wm. Pickiepoche, E.M.

Dear Mrs. Filippini:

...Mr. Riggs is my father and author of the piece in your July 1979 issue...My father and I enjoyed that very much. Your editing was excellent, and your format and layout was really well done - thank you.

I was born in 1948, the youngest child in a family that started having kids in the 1930's. I never met my grandfather, Edgar Leon Riggs, who was the object of your article. My father realized that we kids had missed a lot by not having known this man, so he wrote the story...

Vara Louise Riggs Feddema

MISSING ANY ISSUES OF LAS CALAVERAS?

If you failed to receive any of your copies of "Las Calaveras", please notify the Society so that we may send you the missing copy.

The frequent suggestion that Melones (Robinson's Ferry) was also Bret Harte's Slumgullion cannot be proved or disproved. Harte may or may not have visited the place. The names he used were probably invented, in which case Melones "was" Slumgullion only if one is prone to translate fact to fiction and back to fact again.