

Yankee Hill Dispatch

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Special Edition *The History of Yankee Hill*

On Saturday, April 26th at 11:00am a marker donated by Florence and Rosie Smith at the site of Old Yankee Hill, along Yankee Hill Road, near Hump Hill Road, will be dedicated to commemorate the history of the community. WE HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE! Should it rain that day the dedication will be held May 17th at 11:00am.

Old Yankee Hill

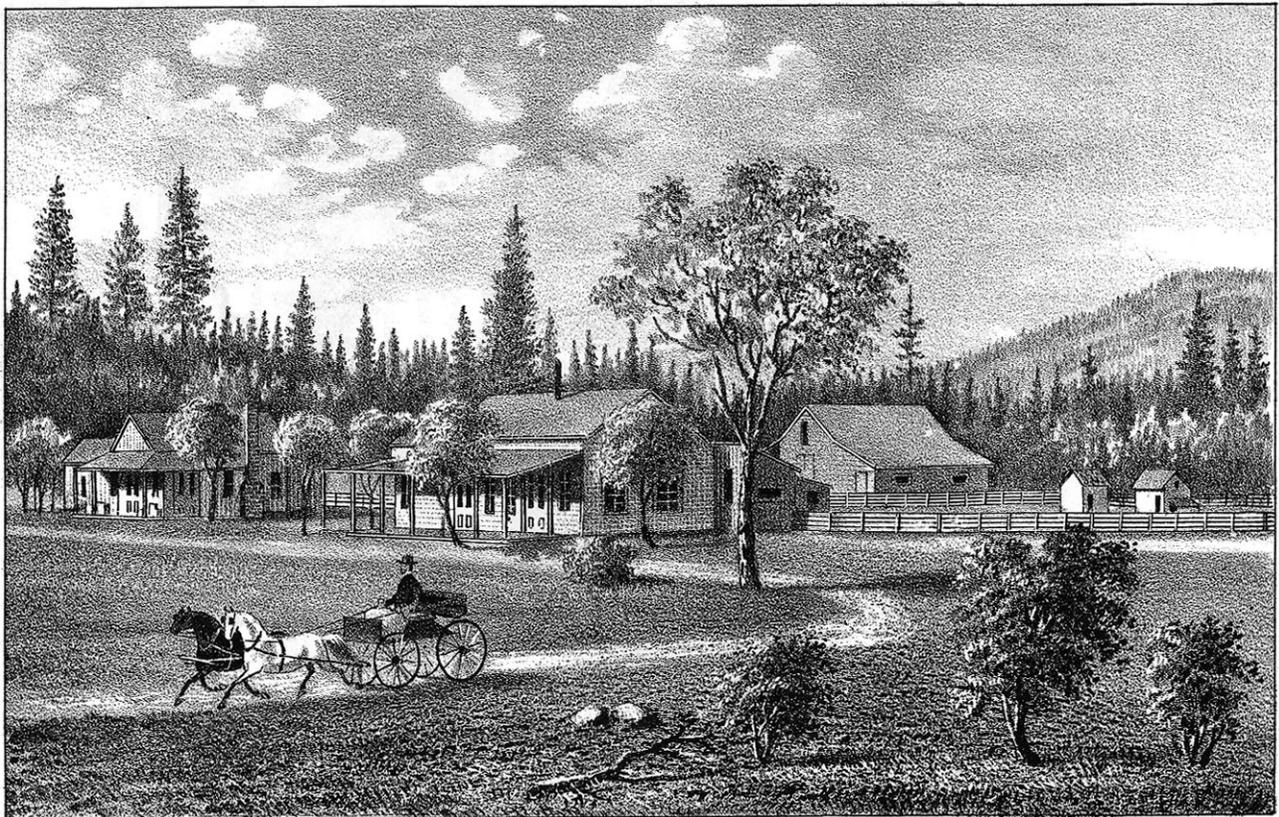
In late 1856 two new mining claims were operating on the hill above Rich Gulch, the Virginia Quartz Mill and the 49 & 56 Quartz Mill. The Virginia claim was located about 300 yards above the 49 & 56 claim. Both of these claims were hard rock mining claims, which meant they tunneled to find gold embedded in the quartz rock. The area around the 49 & 56 mine was referred to as the Yankee Hill ledge. The area nearby that housed the Virginia Company offices was referred to as Monte Vista. The 1862 map of Butte County displays the Monte Vista name more prominently than Yankee Hill. But the 49 & 56 claim was the more productive mine. The 1859 Butte county Tax rolls listed the value of the Virginia quartz mine's assets at \$1,000 and the 49 & 56 mine's assets, including a boarding house, at \$7,000.

Michael Henry Wells was one of the original investors in the 49 & 56 mine. Born in Philadelphia on Christmas day in 1832, he settled in San Francisco in 1850 where he helped organize the Pennsylvania #12 Fire Company. Several years later he traveled to Rogue River, Oregon where he operated a store. In 1856 Wells was a member of a party of 130 at Fort Miner in Oregon when 70 were killed by Indians. Soon afterward he traveled to Butte County and in November 14, 1856 along with his partners established the 49 & 56 mine.

Michael Wells is not listed in the 1858 tax rolls, indicating he personally did not own any property. The 49 & 56 mine owned all the assets. It is interesting to note that in January of 1858 a notice was placed in the papers notifying stockholders that if back assessments were not paid, their stock would be sold, indicating



Close-up from the 1862 Map of Butte County showing Spanishtown (Concow Rd & Pinkston Canyon Rd), Frenchtown (Nelson Bar Rd & Lunt Rd), Monte Vista, Yankee Hill and the 49 & 56 Quartz Mill.



STORE AND RESIDENCE OF M.H.WELLS, in 1882

YANKEE HILL, BUTTE CO. CAL,

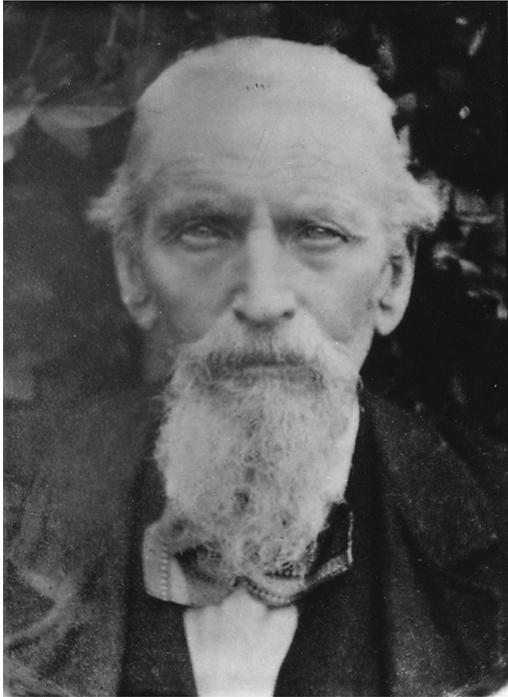
that at that time the mine may not have been very profitable and also allowing Wells the opportunity to increase his shares in the venture. In 1858 it is reported that Wells opened a store at Yankee Hill. The 1859 tax rolls indicate his merchandise was worth \$300 and he had solvent debts owed him of \$1200. The tax rolls still make no mention of his owning any land. In October 1858 the Post Office, established in Feb 1857 at nearby Frenchtown, was moved to the store operated by Wells in Yankee Hill. Officially known as the Yankee Hill post office, this would guarantee the name Yankee Hill a place in history. Ironically, two years earlier, in 1856, the Oroville papers were touting the development of a new town only two miles away called Spanishtown. In a matter of one year, Spanishtown hosted three hotels and numerous small cabins. But Spanishtown's reputation for violence and the disappearance of the surface gold in the area, because of the influx of miners, brought its existence to an abrupt end.

The 49 & 56 mining company continued to add additional services for the community when in 1858 the company donated land for a school. The Yankee Hill School opened next door to the store operated by Wells. In 1862, Wells ran for and was elected Justice of The Peace; he held that position for many years. In 1863 Wells and G.G. Marquis, another early settler at Concow, were involved in the round up of 350 local Indians that were later transported to a reservation. This act may not be as heinous as it sounds. The local military authorities ordered their roundup and removal by whatever means required. Any white man who helped the Indians resist was to be taken as prisoner. Transporting the Indians to a reservation may have seemed like the lesser of two evils to Wells. John Adams Clark, the Grandson of Yohema Clark, the third daughter of Chief Bercha, Chief of the Konkow Indians reported in the 1918 History of Butte County that previously Wells had hidden 40 Indians in the basement of his store to protect them from angry soldiers. He and several others resisted releasing the Indians to the soldiers. Eventually they were forced to turn them over; two were shot by the soldiers for supposed crimes.

By 1867 the Butte County tax rolls indicate Wells owned a lot at Yankee Hill with \$300 in improvements and had \$800 in merchandise in his store. Much of this and his future land acquisitions was probably financed by the selling of his shares in the 49 & 56 mine for \$15,992 in 1866 to N.H. Tilden. Unfortunately for Tilden, the stamp mill at the mine burned down two years later and the mine closed. Meanwhile, Wells continued to acquire more land, by 1874 he owned 40 acres. Sometime in the 1870's Wells built a hotel across the street from his home and store. The house and store are shown in the 1882 History of Butte County. The hotel was probably inspired by the building of the dam at Concow in 1871 and the steady traffic to the lumber mills in Flea Valley. Yankee Hill with its store, post office, hotel and school was serving the communities in Flea Valley, Concow Valley, Big Bend, Rich Gulch as well as the farmers in the immediate area. A.B. Clark, Antone Hotapp, Sam Knowlton, Caleb Nix and W.H. Sweetman were large landowners farming near Wells.

One of the earliest settlers in the Rich Gulch/Yankee Hill area was Alfred Burr Clark who came to the area in 1850; he was a native of Vermont who lived in Oregon City before moving to Yankee Hill. The 1871 tax rolls indicate he owned 40 acres and had 800 sheep and 40 lambs. At one time he had a butcher shop in nearby Frenchtown. By 1885 he had expanded his land holdings to 80 acres and was listed as a boot maker in the Butte County directory. In 1859 Alfred Clark married Yohema, the Konkow Chief's daughter. Kate, as she was known, and Alfred had seven children; many of their descendents still live in the area. It was Alfred Burr Clark who in 1863, with Michael Wells, tried to hide the Indians in the basement of the Wells Store. The Clark family cemetery is located just down the road from Yankee Hill. Both Alfred and Yohema (Katy) Clark are buried there.

The first burial held at the Yankee Hill cemetery was Charles Smith, a resident of Concow, who died at Nelson's Bar; he was buried on May 18, 1875.



Alfred Burr Clark
3 Mar 1822 - 16 Aug 1906



Yohema (Kate) Clark
Winter 1845 - 19 April 1909



DORA WELLS, Ca. 1890.



Michael Wells circa 1865

In 1876 Michael Wells married Dora Spencer, they had three children. In 1883 Wells expanded the hotel by adding another building adjacent to the first hotel. The old building had a dining hall downstairs and the upstairs was later converted to a residence. This expansion coincided with Joseph Mullen's expansion of his hotel at Concow Reservoir. This was probably because the Butte County Chapter of the International Order of Good Templars (an anti-liquor organization) had started holding their yearly conferences at the Concow Reservoir campground, adjacent to the hotel, plus the mines at Cherokee were in full production bringing people to the area.

Wells was an avid reader, his library held 1500 books. Sometime after 1882 Wells built a larger house and winery behind his first home and the store. He was also the agent for the Venus Quartz Mine which was located next to the old 49 & 56 mining claim. One has to wonder if his interest was really in finding gold or in creating jobs at Yankee Hill which brought in trade to his store and hotel.

In 1887 disaster struck the local mining industry when hydraulic mining was outlawed. The runoff into the rivers and the flooding of the land below the mine operations was ruining the farm lands downstream. There was no hydraulic mining at Yankee Hill but the impact on Cherokee was immediate. Many of the local miners left the area to head for Virginia City, Nevada and the great silver strike. The dreams of most of the local land owners were fading as people slowly left the area. Joseph Mullen sold his hotel at the Concow reservoir and moved to Arizona.

How big was Yankee Hill? There is no evidence that Wells ever tried to speculate in real-estate and divide up his acreage into smaller lots. Rather, he apparently allowed businesses that supplemented his own to build in the immediate area. There was a blacksmith shop and a stage depot; it is not clear if the store and hotel acted as the depot as well. The store ledgers, some of which are at the Butte County Historical Society, do reflect a steady business with 4 to 8 customers per day, spending from \$2.00 to \$7.00 each. The school averaged from 10 to 30 students per year. Many times the teacher lived at the hotel. Rural schools were where new teachers were usually assigned; they usually were young, single women. The population of Yankee Hill has been reported in County histories as up to 300 people. But as it is today, Yankee Hill was more of a community than a town, encompassing a large area. The heyday of activity was probably in the early 1870's when nearly 250 Chinese laborers were employed digging the ditches that brought water from a series of reservoirs high in the hills through the Concow Valley to Cherokee, supporting hydraulic mining. Supply wagons with building materials were making regular trips to the area. There were also small cattle drives through Yankee Hill to Flea Valley for summer grazing; there was a corral at Yankee Hill. And while there was a hotel at Concow Reservoir, there was no store, so people had to travel to Yankee Hill for provisions.

Michael Wells continued to operate the hotel, store and post office at Yankee Hill until his death in 1891. His funeral was well attended by white, Indian and Chinese mourners in Oroville. He was very well respected and his lengthy obituary talked about his positive attitude and generosity with both his time and money. He was always there for his friends. This explains why for many years when he held 4th of July dances at the Yankee Hill Hotel, they were attended by as many as 100 people from all over the area. Wells died on July 9th, five days after his last 4th of July dance, from an apparent heart attack.

After Michael Wells' death, his wife Dora continued to operate the store, hotel and post office, but the population continued to decline. In 1904 a serious drought hit the area after the Concow Dam failed the previous year and was not repaired. Dora Wells tried to sell 80 acres along with the big house, store and post office for \$2500. Dora had taken up residence above the dining hall in the hotel. She was unsuccessful in her attempts to sell.



Yankee Hill Hotel and Wells Home Circa 1920

*The hotel built in 1883 is on the left. The old hotel is on the right
Living quarters were located upstairs. A dining hall was located below.*



***Yankee Hill Store and bar located across the street from the hotel.
Wells home shown in the 1882 sketch was located to the right***

That same year Dirk Johnson, a local resident, had an argument with his wife. He threatened to kill her so she ran away and took refuge in the Yankee Hill Hotel. The next day Dirk showed up at the hotel with a gun looking for his wife. About the same time the constable arrived and found Dirk in the Wells kitchen where he was promptly arrested.

In 1908 the Yankee Hill Post Office was moved from the Wells store to the Lunt family home on Nelson Bar Road. Sometime afterwards the store was closed. Mrs. Wells continued to operate the hotel until her death in 1936. The family retained the property using caretakers to manage the hotel; many of the guests were now permanent residents renting rooms. The family finally sold the property to the Hoefling Brothers mining company in June of 1946. They already had mining interests at Big Bend. In 1949 the Hoefling Brothers put the property up for sale retaining the mineral rights.

Florence Owens had moved to Yankee Hill at the age of 4, when in 1932 she moved from Pennsylvania with her parents, Lee and Rosella Owens and grandparents, Ed and Alma Chadwick. Florence attended the Yankee Hill School before it closed in 1943. Married and living in Oroville, Florence and her husband Skeet Smith purchased 260 acres encompassing the Yankee Hill property in 1949 for \$2500. The minimum wage law at that time was \$.49 per hour. They would buy the mineral rights some years later for roughly \$11,000. The enclosed map shows the structures that were on the property when Florence and Skeet purchased it.

Within months after acquiring the property, the hotel caught fire when one of the tenants tipped a kerosene lamp over. Florence and her husband Skeet, a heavy equipment operator for the State, were not living on the property at the time. The hotel was completely destroyed. Several families living at the hotel were forced to relocate.

In 1950 PG&E was running high tension power lines through Yankee Hill. As part of the settlement for a right of way, power was brought to Yankee Hill and the old school house. It allowed Florence and Skeet the luxury of an electric pump on the old town well. The roads in the area were still mud and gravel; they would not be paved until the late 1960s, about the same time Lake Oroville was completed.

In the early 1950s the old house next to the old store was falling apart, so it was torn down and used for fire wood. The house had at one time been rented to the Clark family. It was probably Michael Wells' first home shown in the 1882 history of Butte County. The Yankee Hill School was rented out as a residence to workers working on the Pulga power plant. Later the school was used for community dances. Florence's grandfather, Ed Chadwick, painted scenes on the walls inside the school.

There were two small cabins at the bend in Yankee Hill Road. An article in the 1904 Oroville newspaper talks about a well known local character, Uncle Billy Rudd, living in a cabin at Yankee Hill. In 1904, he was 79 years old and a veteran of the Mexican war. He lived on a pension of \$12 per month. He cooked his own food and lived alone. His daily routine was to stop by the hotel, store and post office during the afternoon, usually finding old cronies to play Pedro (Pedro is a card game usually played with four people). They managed to finish the game about the time the mail arrived. The two small cabins disappeared sometime in the 1950's, one accidentally catching fire.

About 1960 Florence and Skeet moved a two bedroom mobile home onto the property on the location of the old big house and winery, which by now was in bad shape so it too had to be torn down. This big house had been the Wells family second home. The Smith family, consisting of Florence, Skeet and their son Skeeter and daughter Rosella, were now permanent residents at Yankee Hill. In



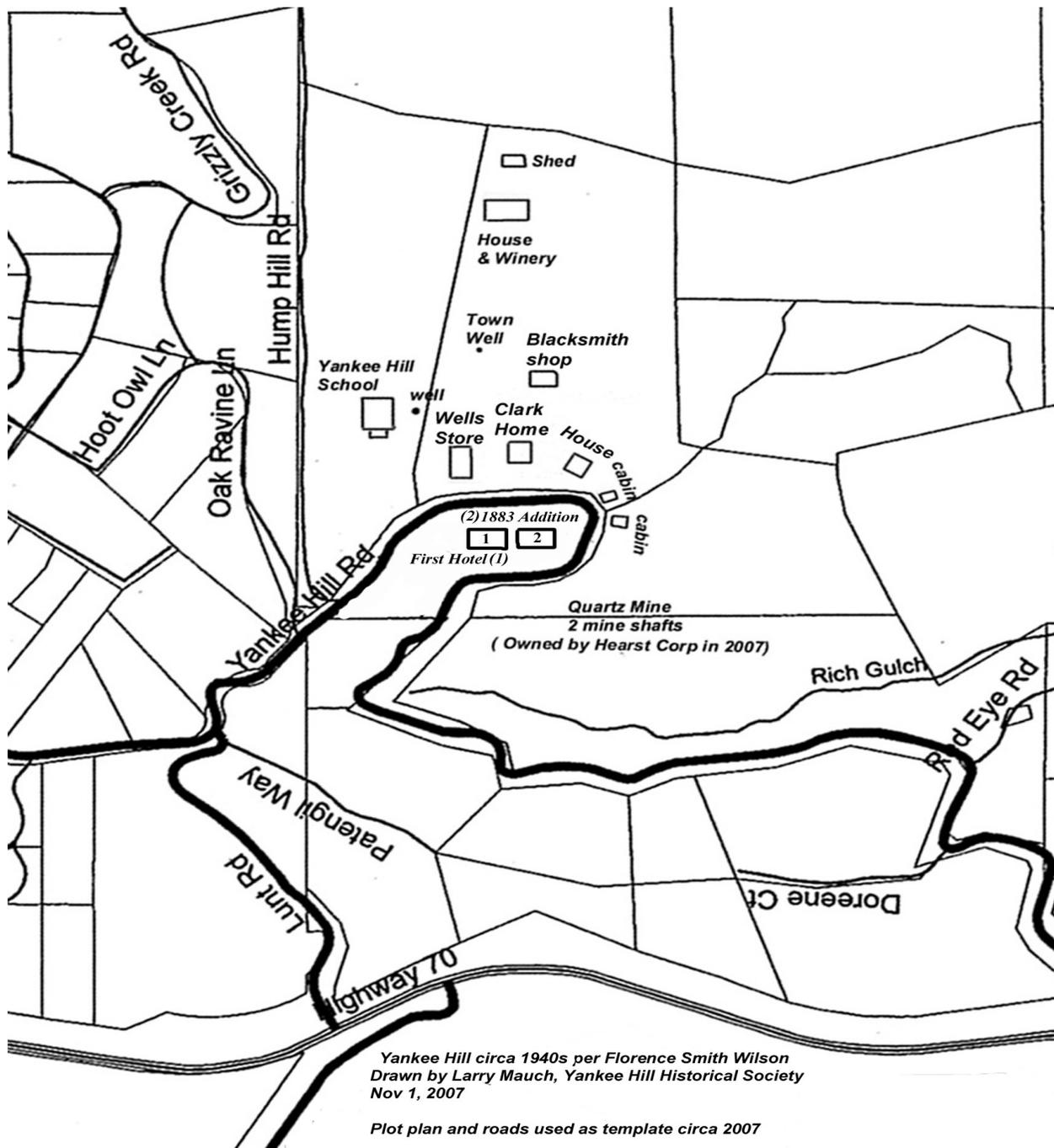
Yankee Hill School circa 1966



M.H. Wells in front of Yankee Hill School Circa 1880's

1964 the well ran dry at Yankee Hill. This was probably related to the work being done on the rail-road tunnel in preparation for Lake Oroville. Florence drove to Dark Canyon with a 350 gallon water tank so they could water the livestock; they had about 30 head of cattle. That same year Skeet passed away. It was time for Florence to sell the property at Yankee Hill. An attempt was made to donate the old school to the Butte County Historical Society. Unfortunately, the school was in bad shape and the historical society had no place to put it. Eventually it fell down, probably with some help from the new owners. Today, only the water pump remains at the site, the last remnant of old Yankee Hill.

Editor's note: For more reading about Yankee Hill see the Diggins Vol 28 #2, published in 1982 by the Butte County Historical Society. Copies are available at the society museum in Oroville. Also for more information about the Konkow Indians and their history visit their web page at www.maidu.com



YHHS Happenings

First Saturday each month, Bunko Party!! - The first Saturday of each month at 1:00pm we have a bunko party at the old school. Prizes and a raffle are held to raise funds for the school restoration. The restoration crew has been feverishly working on the school and we want to make sure we can provide the materials to keep them going! The money raised from the bunko party is a primary contributor to the restoration fund. It is fun and supports a great cause. SEE YOU THERE!

School Restoration Report - The work is beginning again! The planned additional room adjacent the restroom behind the school is being built! The cement has been poured for the floor. The area will be used for storage and possible display space open for special events. Ya can't keep a good crew down!

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