

1-26-1957

Winch and Cable Stolen From Oregon City Mine

OROVILLE — A hand winch with 50 to 60 feet of cable was reported stolen from a mine about three quarters of a mile south of Oregon City, the sheriff's office reported today.

The winch belonged to Jack Stookesberry, of Oroville, who said the theft occurred sometime during the past two weeks.

Stookesberry said the winch and cable weighed approximately 60 pounds.

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Time And Fire Wreak Havoc On Historic Community Of Yankee Hill



RELICS Mrs. O. H. Lunt shows a group of Indian mortars collected in Yankee Hill by members of her family during the last century. The fig tree, center, was planted by James Smith, her husband's grandfather, who settled in the foothills north of Oroville more than 100 years ago.

Note: The Lunt family home, built in 1882, still stands on Nelson Bar Road.

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By Melvin N. Gagnon
Bee staff writer

YANKEE HILL, Butte Co.—

A collection of relics remains to mark the once thriving mining community of Yankee Hill, 20 miles north of Oroville, the county seat.

Mrs. O. H. Lunt, formerly of Woodland, Yolo County, has lived in Yankee Hill for the last 40 years. Her husband's grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. James Smith, came here from North Carolina in the 1850s and built a hotel along the main road. The main section of the old hostelry has been preserved as the Lunt home.

Three Communities

Mrs. Lunt recalls from spoken accounts of earlier members of the family how Yankee Hill was made up of three communities around the ridge.

French town was the lower section, Spanish town the up-

per, and across the ridge was Old Yankee Hill.

West of the Lunt home are remains of an old Indian camping ground. Occasionally parts of a stone mortar, arrow heads or pieces of baskets are found in the earth, blackened by many evening fires of long ago.

Indian Relics

The Lunts have a collection of grinding mortars and some Indian baskets.

Old Yankee Hill now is part of the Alvin E. Smith ranch. Ruins of the original school and one of the many cabins which covered the oak shadowed slopes still stand.

A battered safe was found by the Smiths on what they believe to be the ruins of a Wells Fargo office and store.

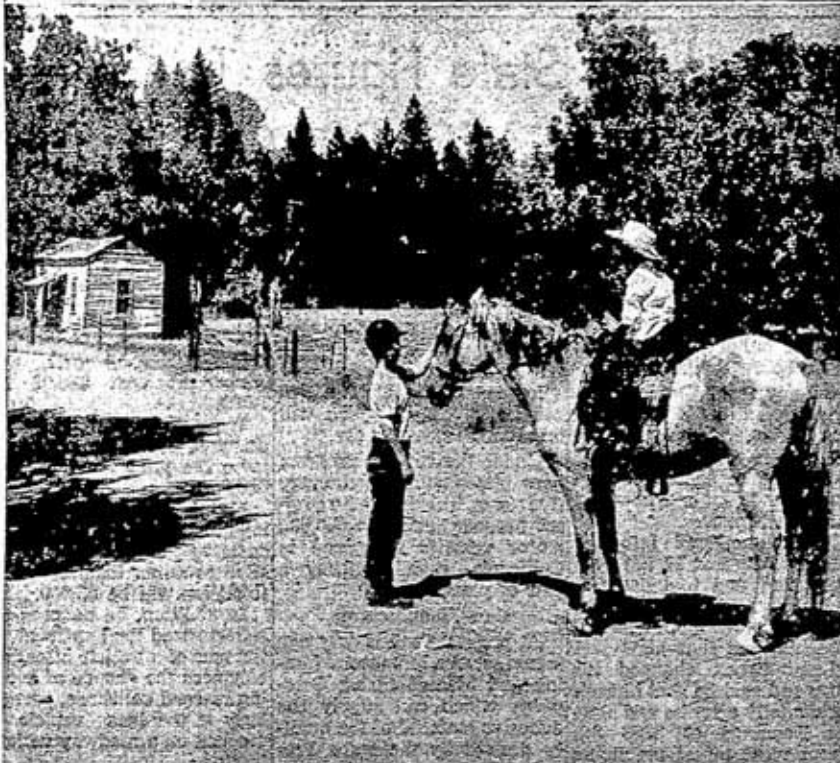
Mrs. Smith, who grew up on a nearby ranch, has a store ledger she found in the Yankee

Hill Hotel. The record, dated in the 1890s showed flour selling at \$1.75 per hundredweight and gingham at 10 yards for the same price.

The hotel burned about six years ago Mrs. Smith recalls it had been repaired and at the time was occupied by seven families. Fire raced unhampered through the high ceilinged rooms and wagon wide hallways, for the district was without electricity or facilities to pump water. Nothing was saved.

The Smiths have found buried remnants of a pipeline system, indicating the single well on their property probably provided the entire water supply of Old Yankee Hill.

Only now, with electricity on the land, have they been able to replace the bucket and pulley at the well with an electric pump.



A cabin, ready to fall, marks the flat which once was the townsite of Old Yankee Hill in Butte County. Talking to an unidentified visitor is Skeeter Smith, 8, a resident who roams the historical spot on his horse.

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Few Know, Little Remains Of Once Boisterous Gold Rush Helltown

BYGONE A dilapidated home, a family graveyard and stone foundations and walls are all which remain of Helltown, a ghost town near

Centerville, Butte County. The house pictured below was built in 1852 by John Nicholl in the once boisterous mining camp in Butte Creek Canyon.



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Helldown can be reached only by crossing this suspension bridge, literally a swinging span. Built many years ago it is kept in repair by the Butte

County Road Department. It was repaired after the floods of 1954 through the efforts of the Paradise Parlor, Native Daughters of the Golden West.

By Margaret Kimerer
Bee correspondent

PARADISE, Butte Co. — A family graveyard, stone foundations and a few walls of a dilapidated house built in 1852 are all that remain of the boisterous mining camp, Helldown, which flourished in Butte Creek Canyon during the gold rush.

The town site is 10 miles east of Chico, Butte County, near the present community of Centerville and just below Doe Mill Peak on property owned by Rolland March, who acquired it more than 20 years ago.

Heavy Vote

"I've been told," March said, "That during its heyday more votes were polled in Helltown than any other spot in the county."

March explained that Helltown, first named Hilltown, acquired its name when an easterner, in writing home, forgot to dot the i, so letters came addressed to Helltown.

However, it could well have received its name from the feverish activity which prevailed during the gold rush. The foundation and cellar of a saloon and dance hall, said to be a bright spot in the old days, still remain. There was a general store operated by Billy Nesbitt, a hotel, blacksmith shop, stable and numerous dwellings.

1852 Home

One of these, built by John Nicholl in 1852 of lumber carried down the mountains by Indians, still stands. Nicholl, who came from New York State, to mine gold, stayed in Helltown the rest of his life and became widely known throughout the county as a horticulturist. His foothill dwelling was termed a garden paradise.

His three sons, born in the family home, never married and never ventured far from the homeplace. The last, Jimmy, died in 1936. The entire family is buried in the white stoned cemetery which stands high on a hill near the house.

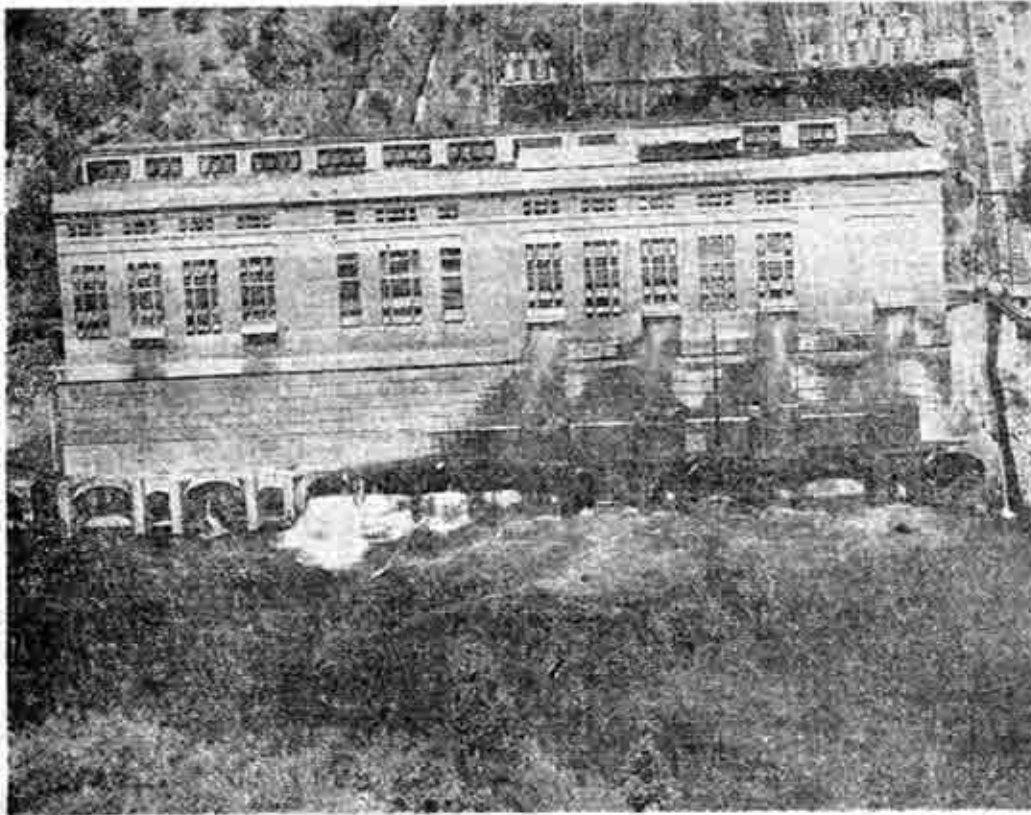
Early Orchard

On the steep slopes Nicholl planted all types of fruits and shrubs. Among these, still standing and still bearing sweet fruit, is a group of orange trees which March believes may be as old or older than the Mother Orange tree at Bidwell Bar. Many other fruit trees, shrubs and plants, planted by Nicholl, still remain, bloom and bear fruit.

The town continued several years during the gold rush and was once the scene of much excitement when a band of Indians, accused of stealing mules, was lynched by an angry mob of citizens who convicted them because of blood stains on the Indians' hunting knives.

Death Of Town

By 1886 Helltown had become a memory and piled up boulders and the barren worked out ravines gave mute testimony to the industry of the thousands of miners who had flocked to the area in the search for gold. But Nicholl had stayed on, mining a little, but mostly raising cattle, fruits and a garden. He carried the mail from Oroville to Centerville. The historic buggy since has been given to the Chico Parlor, Native Sons of the Golden West.



BIG BEND POWERHOUSE—Sixteen miles up the Feather River from Oroville is the first step on Pacific Gas and Electric Company's ten-plant "Stairway of Power" that ascends to Lake Almanor. Completed in 1908 with a capacity of 70,000 kilowatts, Big Bend was the first hydro-

electric development on the swift-flowing Feather. The rising waters of the lake that will form behind Oroville Dam when it is completed will inundate Big Bend, silencing its turbines after more than a half-century of service to Northern California.

Big Bend Plant To Be Submerged

Majestic Oroville Dam, towering upward out of the Feather River Canyon, will symbolize control and development of the mighty Feather for the benefit of all Californians. But ironically the rising waters of the reservoir behind the dam will swirl over and erase the venerable, productive symbol of the beginnings of that beneficial development.

Big Bend powerhouse, first of the great Pacific Gas and Electric Company installations to reap the energy of the Feather's plunging waters and power the growth of Northern California, will be gone. After m

half-century of service, Big Bend's generators will be stilled to make way for a new and greater public servant.

But Big Bend will live to see PG&E's "Stairway of Power," begun with its own construction in 1908, grow by 1961 to a network of ten Feather River hydroelectric powerhouses with an aggregate capacity of a million horsepower. These plants, six now in operation and the other four scheduled for completion before Oroville Dam is completed, will make the Feather California's mightiest river by far.

Only One Affected
Big Bend, the only PG&E plant

to be affected by the building of the dam, will have amassed a remarkable record of power production before it disappears beneath the lake. During their half-century-plus of work, the plant's generators will have produced about 22.7 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity. That is enough to serve all the homes and industries of modern Central and Northern California for an entire year.

Big Bend, aptly named for an oxbow in the Feather's course, has pulled its load well.

Completion of the powerhouse in 1908 climaxed a decade of lively competition among rival development companies which recognized in the fast-falling Feather a great source of hydroelectric energy. The plant was built by the Great Western Power company, the organization which emerged with all the water and land rights and financial backing necessary to proceed with the project.

Saw Possibilities
Engineer Julius M. Howells, a cousin of author William Dean Howells, first recognized Big Meadows (now Lake Almanor) as an almost-perfect hydroelectric reservoir site before the turn of the century. Howells convinced fi-

nanciers Edwin T. Earl and Guy C. Earl of Los Angeles and Oakland that a project on the Feather was sound and, with their financial assistance, obtained options on all the ranches in Big Meadows in 1902.

But when Howells and the Earls turned their attention to procuring water rights they found another company contesting them—the MacDonald-Cornell interests, later incorporated as the Golden State Power Company. And when they sought to acquire the Big Bend site for their powerhouse a third group in their way—the Eureka Power Company headed by Dr. Ray V. Pierce of Buffalo, N.Y., of patent medicine fame.

Even in 1902 Big Bend had a long history of riches gained and fortunes lost. In the early days the stream bed had yielded plentiful gold to the placer miners. Below Big Bend at Cape Claim, \$600,000 had been recovered in 40 days in 1865. The Union Cape placer paid \$275,000 in one season, and Toland Bar gave up more than a million dollars in 1856 and 1857. Miners believed that if the stream flow could be diverted from the Big Bend channel, another fortune could be recovered from its gravel.

Dr. Pierce organized a company in 1880 which drilled a tunnel 16 feet by 12 feet, 12,000 feet long, and diverted the river. The gold was not there. But 20 years later, when he learned that a hydroelectric development was contemplated which might find his tunnel useful, Pierce had to be reckoned with.

It was the Great Western group that finally consolidated all the rights and interests necessary. Pierce's tunnel, enlarged and extended to provide a fall of 465 feet, was incorporated into the project and still is carrying water to the turbines of Big Bend powerhouse. At the time it was completed the plant was the largest hydroelectric operation west of the Mississippi.

Great Western transmitted its power on a steel tower line to Brighton Substation at Sacramento thence to Oakland. But there the company was compelled to sell Big Bend's electric output to the recently-organized Pacific Gas and Electric Company. This was the first encounter in what was to become a spirited rivalry between two far-seeing groups of West-builders.

They finally became one big happy family but there was many a scuffle before unity was achieved. That is another, much longer story.

11-28-1957

Yule Trees Cut In Butte Are Traced By Matching Ends

McClatchy Newspapers Service

CHICO, Butte Co.—Christmas trees cut illegally in Butte County were traced to a Los Altos tree lot by matching a section of a stump to a tree, with the result William P. Owens of Oroville, Butte County, and George Hendrix of Yankee Hill, Butte County, face theft charges.

Owens is charged with grand theft in the Paradise, Butte County, Judicial District Court and Hendrix with receiving and storing stolen property on his Yankee Hill ranch. Each posted \$1,000 bail.

Charles R. Arment, timber lands manager for the Diamond Match Company, said one of the silver tips has been identified from among 400 offered for sale on the lot in Los Altos, Santa Clara County. William Wood, company forester, and

Deputy Sheriff Bruce Cloak cut a section of stump, took it to Los Altos, and matched it with one of the trees.

Arment estimated 1,000 trees were cut and placed the loss at approximately \$2,500 based on the cost of replanting and raising the seedlings to a five foot height.

Owens and Hendrix told the officer they purchased the trees in Oregon, near Quincy, Plumas County, and from a Pacific Gas and Electric Company clearance project in the Feather River Canyon.