

The Birth of a Mining Community: A Rhode Islander Makes Good



Rich strikes on the Mokelumne, Stanislaus and Tuolumne Rivers and their tributaries occasionally led to establish mining camps. Some even lasted long enough to mature into semi-permanent towns but once the surface deposits of placer **gold** played out, many communities struggled to survive. The lucky ones developed other resources and remained past the initial boom. Angels Camp was one of those fortunate few.

In 1848, Rhode Islander **Henry Pinkney Angell** is said to have joined the James Carson and John Robinson expedition of 92 men who left Monterey in May to head for the gold country. By July, they found themselves mining on Weber Creek. Moving on again, they stopped to try their luck on a small tributary of the Stanislaus River. Where that unnamed tributary met Dry Creek, the prospectors finally found great promise and set-up camp.

At the newly established camp Henry Angell opened the first store in a tent, trading essentials for gold. By the spring of 1849, the camp had grown to 300 miners on Angels Creek.

The available placer deposits around Angels Camp began to deplete within a year and a half but enough of the town's expanded trading center remained to sustain it. In 1854, the first important quartz discovery was made on the Davis-Winter's claim where the Winters brothers and Davis & Company had been ground sluicing. The vein of quartz was 10 to 90 feet wide and ran roughly parallel to today's **Highway 49**. By 1858, several arrastras, four steam powered stamp mills and nine water powered mills were working along the vein.

Image of Henry Angell courtesy of the University of the Pacific

Fate Takes its Toll: Down But Not Out

Mining camps often experienced a metamorphosis from tent towns to wood-framed structures which were susceptible to fire. Angels Camp was no exception with major conflagrations in 1855 and 1856. Out of the ashes grew better buildings and the determination to prosper.

By the end of 1865 the Winters-Davis vein yielded 20,000 to 50,000 ounces of gold but it was not enough to sustain the industry.

A Second Chance: Another Rush is On



The technology to advance the mines deeper than ever before was finally available by the 1880s. This transformation came about largely due to outside investors providing the necessary capital. The industrial mining era had finally arrived. **The Sultana, Angels Quartz, Lightner and the Utica mines** were the major players and employers. The 1890 census recorded the population of Angels Camp at 917, almost triple what it was 10 years before. The boom years of the 1890s saw

Calaveras mines produce more than 10% of California's total gold output.

The prosperity and change of the 1890s was reflected in the growth of ethnic diversity in Angels Camp. Serbians, Italians, French, Irish and Chinese immigrants all contributed to a **vibrant community**.

With the 1902 arrival of the Sierra Railway in Angels Camp, local farmers, ranchers and lumbermen hoped to reach the expanding markets of the larger population centers in the Valley. Unfortunately, the rail lines did not extend far enough into Calaveras County to encourage extensive development.

Rest and Rebirth: History and Heritage

Due to the rising cost of operations and labor shortages brought on by World War I (1914-1918), many mines began shutting down. The 1930s brought a renewed interest in mining until World War II with the fateful closing of all gold mines as non-essential industries in 1942. The

war-time scrap drives left only a few surviving bits and pieces of physical evidence to remind us of the mining era.

In 1925, the Angels Booster Club was founded to promote interest and growth in the area. When an Oakland preacher came to speak to the Club, he suggested that Calaveras County adopt official County colors, gold for mining and green for Jim Smiley's jumping frog. A few years later in **1928 the Calaveras Jumping Frog Jubilee** was initiated to celebrate **Mark Twain's** famous work and the paving of downtown Angels Camp.



Today, Angels Camp's legacy includes a world renowned annual Frog Jump, prosperous farms, vineyards and ranches and the ever-present romance and **lure of the gold rush**, an indelible part of a remarkable history.

Image of the Utica Hotel Star Saloon in Downtown Angels