

TAPE #48

MRS. CHESTER MC MULLEN and various family members.

Taped: June 1979

Reference: John Ratto's scrapbook

This is a photo of Colonel Jackson; the town was named after him. I don't know where Uncle John got all these pictures but it sure is a book. Uncle was a mining man.

(Who put this book together?)

An uncle of ours, John Ratto. He used to be a supervisor, and he also ran the theaters in the county. But he gave the whole theater business up, because he wanted to make his fortune in the mines. He was mine ~~xxxxx~~ crazy.

(Did all the theaters have his name on them?)

No. There was the Ione Theater, and the Jackson Theater, and the Plymouth Theater.

(So he sold them?)

Yes. Tam bought them all. But they didn't run them all. They ran the one in Ione for a little while, and they ran the one in Jackson. That was about it. The new theater was the Amador. But the old one was near Spinettis. Where Bennett Auto Parts is.

(Mrs. McMullen's brother)

You know, my Dad was a contractor, and we were building the Spinetti store. And at that time there were some travelling players in town who put on plays. They were calley The Roberts Players. They came from Stockton. They used to come up here once a month. Well, one of the players was Harold Perry, the guy who played The Great Gildersleve.

That was much later on the radio, of course. Well, in this play he wore a derby. They were on their way back to Stockton, and he forgot his derby. The theater was locked up, but we were working around the side. So Perry goes around to the back door and tries to get in. Well, the door was locked, so he tried to bust it down! My Dad yelled, what the hell you doing! And Perry yelled back, I gotta get my derby! So my Dad said, you go get the janitor down at the National Hotel. And that's what happened.

(If you are coming from Martell down Gackson Gate road; what's the first old building, two story, on your left?)

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~~That's~~ That's the ~~KAKY~~ Residence. Used to be a boarding house. Underneath they had a saloon. All these joints used to be boarding houses. This place was one. (Across the street from the present Teresa's Restaurant.) You see, all these places were real close to the mines. Suraci's Restaurant was a boarding house too. Palletti owned it. And Bomba had it before Palletti. Frank Bomba and Albert Bomba leaved near us, and I remember them having to do work there before school each day. And they used to sell beer in those quart bottles. And down where the Wheel Inn is; that used to be a boarding house. It used to be a two story building. And down at Suraci's it was the same way. And someone owned Bomba's before they did, because they had the bunkhouse for the miners up in back of the saloon. And the Perovich's Boarding House was in town too. They finally made them tear it down. And the Broadway hotel; it was a boarding house. My father was one of the first boarders there. He was 21 years old. The Marcuchi's built the Broadway Hotel.

(Did your dad work in the mines?)

Yes, he did.

(The following is a quote from a note written in the scrapbook.)

"Squire Yates of Fiddletown was trying a case and was convinced the witness was not telling the truth. So with much emphasis said, 'I declare this court adjourned long enough to call that man a damned liar!' Court's in session!"

(And referring to the building across from the Chinese store in Fiddletown, the following was written.)

"Anna May Wong's father once lived here."

Here are photos of Angelo and John Rossi from Volcano. Angelo was a mayor of San Francisco.

(Looking at these photos of the Argonaut Mine, it makes me wonder how the survivors managed to make it. The wives and orphans, that is.)

Well, in them days you could buy a pair of overalls for fifty cents! And your wages were \$3.00 a day.

(Do you know who ran the Argonaut then?)

No. I think it was a couple a guys from San Francisco.

(What year did Attorney General Brown descend on Jackson and close it down.)

1954, I think.

(What did it do to the town?)

It killed it. But I remember long before that, it was during prohibition, all these saloons were wide open. They served boolegged liquor and they gambled and everything. Anyhow, they had spotters all over, and whenever the "prohibes" (Slang for prohibitionists) started to come up here, they'd let the town know, and everybody would ditch everything. They'd show up and wouldn't find a god-damned thing!

(Why were they allowed to get away with it all those years?)

They minded their own business. Bomba got caught. Yeah, they caught a few of them. We lived right in back of the saloon, and they poured all the liquor out the back, and it came down in our yard! Then it just poured down Kennedy Street. They had all their barrels in behind the store, behind a fake wood wall. This was in a wood-shed. And there was no trouble in Jackson. It was peaceful. No murders or anything like that.

Our dad used to make grappo up in a little cabin we have up here. He had a still up there; the stuff was 100 proof. He'd cut it down with distilled water. Dad would be up there all the time working on it. I'll never forget the day I got married, and he gave Jimmy Hickey a wineglass of it. He almost fell on his butt!

Well, years ago you could leave your house open; nobody would steal a damn thing. But the last two years when we had the cow camp up at twin lakes; why, they come in here and stole everything. Smashed our stove all to hell in the bargain!

(There have been a lot of movies made here; do you remember any?)

One called the Grey Ghost. And Raggio's ranch was used for filming some. And Will Rogers, he filmed here. And John Wayne too. I remember John Vicini and Johnny Ratto, my uncle, and Warren Taylor's father; they used to play "solo". They played 25, 50, and 75 dollars! Big stakes in those days.

Oh, and Clara Bow was here. She stayed at the National Hotel.

They also made the TV show, The Big Country, with Barbara Stanwick. That was made here and around Stockton.