

TAPE #41RUTH CLARKE

Taped: June 1979

Reference: Famous Characters out of the West and a trip down
Highway 49.

They always say you're supposed to start any speech with a joke. I figured if I stood up here that was joke enough, but I have one and it's the story of a certain great personage in Sacramento who was fishing at the Malones Dam. He slipped in and was drowning, when three young men rescued him. They pulled him to shore, and he was properly appreciative. And he said, isn't there something I can do for you? Yes, the first young man said. I've been trying to get into Davis, but I've been having difficulty; could you get me into UC Davis?

Nothing to it, he answered, my secretary will take care of it in the morning.

The second young man said, well yes; I've been trying to get a small business loan, and I just don't know the right people.

Fine! We'll see that you get your grant in the morning.

And he noticed that the third young man was standing there, looking very sad and pensive, and he said, what can I do for you?

The young man said, well, I guess all you can do for me is get me a nice plot in Forest Lawn Cemetery.

What do you want with that?

Well, he said, when The Friends of the River find out that I didn't let you drown, I'm gonna get killed!

You've all taken the trip from Vinton to Oakhurst, probably many times. I have; peacemeal and a couple of times the whole bit. And today I want you to exert yourselves a little and use your imaginations, because I'm going to bring back some of the old timers, just for fun. We start at the north terminus of the Golden Highway 49, Vinton, in beautiful, rugged Sierra County. Probably the least changed of any part of the entire 318 miles of the historic highway. Vinton was named for ~~MISS VINTON BOWEN~~ ~~VINTON BOWEN~~ Miss Vinton Bowen, whose father, Henry Bowen, was one of the creators of the Sierra Valley Railway. Busses, Cars and trucks have more or less replaced the railway today.

Gold was discovered in the north fork of the Yuba in 1849, so it knew its greatest heyday before the turn of the century. In 1869 it announced the discovery of a 141 pound nugget of gold, at that time valued at 30,000 dollars. At today's price it is over 400,000 dollars.

We stop in at Sierra City where may be seen the old Bush Building. It was built in 1871 ~~1871~~ and over one of the doorways may be seen the initials E.C.V. E. Clampus Vitus. In 1853 a historic event occurred that is still having state wide repercussions.

A group of miners, aware of the hazards of their profession., banded together as a protectorate of miners, widows, and children, in time of disaster and ~~bereivement~~ bereivement. They took the title of E. Clampus Vitus. If, occasionally, they forgathered to discuss business or pass the hat for an unfortunate family, and relieved their tensions with some "slippery gulch", so be it. But how astounded they would have been if they dropped into Murphy diggins

about 125 years later on Memorial Day to see hundreds of red shirted Clampers with their spouses, carrying on the traditions of that society honoring men of great deeds and perpetuating the spirit of historic preservation. And when they tell you that Clampers are just a bunch of roudys, stop and count up the number of historic plaques that they've placed around the state. Their number far exceeds that of any other organization.

We move on now to Downeyville, noting the old gallows on display, wondering if Major Downey, were he here today, would not hold it a good thing to see it re-activated, in light of todays handling of justice.

A quick look at the Bridgeport famous covered bridge. At the time of construction the longest covered bridge in the world, and an engineering feat, famous in its day. Would that those men could see the Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate; man's progress.

In Nevada City visit the Assay Office. Go back to its great days and think of the value of gold today.

Would the builders of the beautiful, old National Hotel, built in the 1860's, care to handle the crowd that flocks there today when reservations have to be made a month in advance. Would the builders of the recently renovated old theater believe that it has gained national fame?

The Empire Mine in Grass Valley, which operated continuously for over 100 years, and is now a state park, hosts thousands of guests yearly. Visit the home of the once notorious ~~Lila~~ Montez in Grass Valley, ~~where the opinion of her might be~~ where you wonder what her opinion might be of Liz Burton, Jane Fonda, and Farrah Fawcet-Majors.

I, personally, think she would twitch her ~~bussle~~ bussle.

Stop off at Auburn and visit the old firehouse. What heroic deeds it could recount. The intrepid volunteers hand-hauling the cumbersome carts, lugging the unwieldy hoses; modern equipment would boggle their minds. And what would these miners say if they watched the streams dry up in summer, and you were to take them on a tour of Folsom Dam.

Probably the most famous spot on the Golden Chain Highway is Coloma, where you might well say it all began. Visualize James Marshall and John Sutter standing by the famous Marshall Monument, watching the thousands who come to observe this famous spot where Marshall discovered gold. I think James would turn to John and say, I don't believe it! And John, thinking of the thousands of acres under cultivation, he too might say, I don't believe it either!

If I shocked you with my remark about the gallows, perhaps I better not express how I feel about the famous, or infamous, utilitarian hangmans tree in Placerville, or Old Hangtown as it was called. It was one of the most colorful spots in the Mother Lode.

Justice was justice, and there was little differing opinion on the ~~efficacy~~ efficacy of the death penalty, and no vetos.

It was also a point of call for that great precursor of the United Parcel Service, Snowshoe Thompson. And just for a chuckle, imagine Snowshoe coming up over the ridge at the top of the Sierra, over 100 feet of snow, and meeting up face to face with a snowmobile! Or meeting some cross-country skiers whose equipment cost the same as his annyal salary, 1000 dollars. And what would Mr. Studebaker think of those ~~balloon~~ balloon tires and plastic handled

wheel barrows!

Picture J. Ogden Armour, the meat-packer, stopping in at a supermarket and paying 4.95 a pound for a steak. Picture Mark Hopkins, the grocer, wending his way with a cart through a computerized Safeway store.

If intrepid Henry Roth were to dash into the center of Placerville today on his weary, sweat-lathered horse, finishing the first leg of the famous pony express, two things might happen.

The citizenry would casually ask, what TV or movie outfit is he with? Or some dear sob-sister would scream for the SPCA!

Now, allow me to stray from the highway a bit. Fiddletown once had a rather pompous judge. It embarrassed him to say he was from Fiddletown. So he arranged to have the name changed to Oleta. This was in 1878. But it was changed back in 1937. I wish the good judge could have been present last year when in a struggle to prevent the devastation of Fiddletown by an out of state mining corporation, the Secretary of State of California appeared to plead for the ~~villagers~~ village. Would the good judge have believed that the secretary was a woman, and a woman of Chinese ancestry on top of it!

Back to the highway and to Amador! Where Jose Maria Amador, with a small band of Indians made camp on a creek, the spot later to be made into Amador City. He would be honored to know that in 1976 the Amador Co. Historical Society placed a plaque on his Gilroy grave. Last month the Society published a book on Amador, a tribute to an intrepid pioneer. Amador is celebrating its 125th Anniversary on the 14th of June, marking its separation from Calaveras County.

When in 1869 the great bonanza vein was discovered, it gave great impetus to quartz mining, and today the Keystone Mine is the mecca for interested travelers on the Golden Chain Highway.

Sutter Creek was bypassed by John Sutter in his search for a mill-site, however, it eventually became famous as one of Leland Stanford's most successful enterprises. His sale for 400,000 dollars in 1869 of his Lincoln Mine, the former Union Mine, set the stage for his dramatic part in the development of the Central Pacific Railroad. Today one wonders how many of the students at Stanford University are aware that Sutter Creek played such an important part in the creation of that great University.

Let us stray from the highway a bit. Today, Volcano is a quiet little village; not so in the days of 1848 when Colonel Jonathan Stevenson arrived there with his famous New York 7th Regiment. When Volcano gloried in 17 hotels, 35 saloons, and a theater to seat 500 patrons of varying social degrees.

Would old Chief Fuller, patriarch of the Miwok Indians, believe that over a half million dollars had been spent renovating and building the old grinding rocks at Chaw-se into a monument for that tribe where thousands gather for Indian rituals and pagentry.

Who would have guessed back in the gold rush days, that crowds of 10,000 a day would travel to a little spot to vist the world famous Daffodil Hill display?

Jackson, where the Native Daughters of the Golden West originated in 1886, and whose members today number in the thousands and whose

deeds of historical preservation should be gratefully recognized by all historians.

Sometimes the now and the then are not so far apart, since very recently the nostalgic citizens attempted to restore gambling in the city and not too long ago they were frustrated by a sanctimonious, governing body, when they attempted to place a highly deserved monument to those early inhabitants, the lovely ladies of the night.

The unique sight of the famous Kennedy Tailings at Jackson Gate is one of Golden Chain's most popular features.

Mokelumne Hill, where in the battle for the County Seat, the citizens rode all day, voting in every precinct, to win a glorious victory for a short time. If we get instant registration, as some of our officials now advocate, we will have the same results today. Friends of the cultural arts come from far and near to attend the famous Leger Theater, a reminder of past glories.

Passing the San Andreas courthouse, one wonders what Black Bart would think of some of the hyjacking stunts and bank holdups of today. He was a piker!

The recent frog-jump at Angels Camp made me wonder what the Angel Brothers reaction would have been had they had to board up their windows to protect themselves from the lawlessness created by those attending the 1979 Jubilee. Mark Twain could have written a scathing article on that score, causing as much controversy as Bret Harte's column written in nearby Altaville on the ~~plan~~ pliocene scull, that discussion carried only to our day.

The words Carson Hill are still magic words in mining lore. According to mining authority John Burgess, a lump of gold was found there weighing 23⁴/₁₀ troy ounces, valued then at 43,000 dollars. Today it would bring better than 600,000 dollars. One of the most admired features of the Golden Chain Highway is the new addition of the Archie Steveanaw Bridge on the Stanislaw River. Archie, a beloved Senora patriach, was instrumental in forming the Mother Lode Highway Association, which later became known as the Golden Chain Highway 49. Archie worked to bring the highway up to top standard, and it was only fitting that the bridge be named in his honor. Knowing Archie well, I can picture him standing on the bridge, gazing down at the river far below, and making some witty wisecrack to cover the emotion at the honor bestowed upon him. Historical Columbia State Park, though not directly on 49, has played a very important part in the improvement of the highway. Some of the great and colorful figures of Columbia would be interested in its changes, with its somewhat overdone face-lift the famous old Fallon Theater, where plays of yesteryear are given with a modern touch by the University of Pacific, Wouldn't Darius Ogden Mills be fascinated with the great dams and the power plants and water systems that now serve where he once autocratically controlled all the sale of the river's water, to the frustration of the local miner until they rebelled and constructed their own system on the Stanislaw, bringing water down by ditch and flume. Wouldn't those same giants be irate at the spectacle of chained man frustrating the filling of Melones Dam? Use your imagination as to the outcome had they faced such a situation!

The elite of Columbia of that day would have been delighted at the restoration of the old City Hotel, for such a fine purpose as teaching our young people the art of restuarant and culinary dispensation, while giving the public a very pleasurable evening of dining.

Sonora, where 49 meets highway 108 leading over Senora Pass.

The hub of a business unheard of in its gold era. When~~ex~~ the good Dr. Gunn printed the first newspaper in Senora, the Senora Herald, could he have envisioned a newspaper delivered by truck, car, horse, motorcycle, bike to thousands of subscribers. Nor could he picture three hospitals dispensing aid, where he, in his day, was the only doctor for miles around. Mr. Sinon, who hailed from (?), would be envious of the great diesels that transport great logs through the city, where once his faithful oxen were kings of the road.

Dr. Gunn's first adobe dwelling in Senora still rates national interest as a first rate motel, it is far overshadowed by homes in the six figure class in the outskirts of Somora and Columbia. And wouldn't that greatest western pioneer, Jedidiah Strong Smith, be dumbfounded to see on the grounds of Tñolumne County, the old jail museum, a monumemt fitting for he was the first known American to have traversed the Sierra Nevada West to East. And wouldn't the same early day involuntary resident of the old jail be appaled at over a half million dollars was being spent to restore it to its original, rugged, primitive condition!

Reverend James Wood would be bewildered at the modern development of Jamestown. And the Chinese who fought in the famous tong wars near Chinese Camp, would not believe the cavalcade of motor vehicles

that pass their battlefield daily on their way to Yosemite on highway 120.

Old miners would be saddened that they could no longer look at that high and rich diggings, Jacksonville, where they mined, hunted and fished the turbulent Tuolumne. They would never believe that the state maintained a fish hatchery, where fish are spawned and then planted in lakes and streams for the intrepid fisherman!

Coulterville still maintains much of its old charm, not having been brushed by the curse of river development. However, the old Jeffries Hotel still plays host to thousands of visitors.

General John Fremont would search in vain for the site of his old mill at Benton Mill, later known as Bagby, and long since inundated by backwater from Lake McClure. His headquarters at Bear Valley are only a memory, well documented by our own beloved author, Shirley Sargeant. His 44,000 acre estate, bought for 3000 dollars and later sold for 6,000,000 dollars, would frustrate the good general today with its value in astronomical figures.

Mariposa, today celebrating its 125th anniversary, with the continuous use of its court house, and Mariposa is still one of the most beautiful pastoral areas in the Mother Lode, with the gracious old court house as a focal point, it has developed one of the finest, most authentic historical museums in the state. Sparked by the Historical Society, years of research, fund raising, hard manual labor, loving endowments---these have produced an inducement for Yosemite bound tourists to stop and really enjoy marvelous Mariposa.

And we can't overlook one of the great inducments to the Golden Chain's very existence, Yosemite Valley. And here nostalgia really takes over. Perhaps no other artery in California has a more colorful history than the Golden Chain. Part of its glamor is its bizzare, unorthodox roll-call. And leading the list, way out front, sits that great, saint-like figure, John Muir. He, at one time, castigated the sheep men for letting the sheep graze in the valley. He called them a hord of locusts. One wonders what he would say today if he saw the millions of visitors passing through the sacred portals in every known means of transportation, from every nation in the world. I know he would approve of the hikers and backpackers as long as they observed the rules of the park, they would be following in his footsteps, though some of their gear would astonish him. I think he would approve of the restrictions, even though it takes away the very freedom he enjoyed most. He would chuckle to see Mommy and Daddy with junior tucked into a little carryall on Daddy's back. He might have to look twice to see if it was really Daddy because both would have long hair.

Major Savage, purportedly the first white man in Yosemite, would be hard pressed to tell the native from the far-east visitor; he would no doubt beat a hasty retreat to another area. The Indian spirits haunting the valley may wonder why the white man no longer pays homage to the Indian gods with their beautiful nightly firefall and the old-timers who instigated it must wonder too, as do many of us who enjoyed it.

So, we come to the south gate of the park, and I for one can dimly see Gaylen ~~Sparkis~~ Clark standing beside one of the great redwood giants in the Mariposa Grove which he discovered in 1857, giving a friendly salute and bidding us God-speed as we drive on down to the southern terminus of 49.

It is extremely appropriate that we end our journey in the beautiful, oak-studded serenity of Oakhurst.

We have experienced a ~~gamut~~ gamut of emotions on this trip, so let us say goodbye to the Golden Chain Highway 49, in the shadow of John Muir's majestic rain of light!