AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF J A C K S O N

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JACKSON – a city which gold, girls, gambling, and government has enlarged for over 160 years – was born soon after the gold discovery at Coloma. Of course, untold generations of Miwok (Miwuk) Indians, and maybe unknown races, inhabited the environs, if not the place. A ford of a creek and adjacent spring accommodated them.

GOLD! The first non-Indians here, a few months after gold’s discovery, were probably native Californios of Spanish-Mexican-Indian descent. Also arriving that summer were soldiers and sailors who deserted to flock to rich diggings along the Mokelumne River.

Who knows why some Spanish-speaking miner or party dubbed the place Botellas or “bottles” in 1848! We only know that H. H. Bancroft, the legendary state historian, identified the place as Botellas on his 1848 map of northern California’s mining region.

Probably few if any of the camp’s 1848 miners settled in Botellas but a trading post was established on high ground 100 yards or so north of the ford and spring, beneath a spreading live oak which would soon become famous.

Sometime before the fall of 1849, when more Yankee Argonauts flooded in, Botellas (the creek and camp) became Jackson’s Creek, either after some locally-celebrated or nationally-known “Jackson.” Nearby, other miners named Sutter’s Creek after John Sutter of Sutter’s Fort, Amador Creek after Jose Maria Amador.

When middling placers stopped paying a day’s wages, many miners drifted away. But in spring, 1851, prospecting miners discovered gold in quartz rock ledges near Amador Village a few miles northerly. Another rush began for gold in hard rock and Jackson became a market and government center for the region.

INTRIGUE! In 1851, at least three events abetted the camp’s permanency; it got a post office, U.S. mail stage delivery, and political spoils when the Upstart won election as county seat of Calaveras.

Maddened Mokelumne Hill politicians cozened the state legislature to wrest the seat from Jackson in 1852. In retaliation, politicians in Jackson tried to create a new county of Calaveras north of the river. When secession failed to form a county named Mokelumne in ‘52 and ‘53, Jackson incorporated as a town, and resolved to become county seat of a new county by whatever name.

Incidentally, that infamous above-mentioned live oak claimed its first lynchee in 1851 and other lynch mobs elevated nine more victims through 1855 – Jackson’s live oak was the one of most lethal in the gold country.

Jackson and other northern Calaveras politicians continued to agitate for a new county and in May, 1854, the governor signed a bill giving male Calaverans the liberty to vote to divide Calaveras and create Amador County. That election on June 14, 1854, was so corrupt that even male Calaverans the liberty to vote to divide Calaveras and create Amador County. That election on June 14, 1854, was so corrupt that no one then, or now, could determine the real outcome.

But northern Calaveras forces won the propaganda war and created the new county. At the first Amador County election that July when voters selected the county’s first officers, they also gave little Jackson (the five-year-old village was described as “having over 100 homes, some two-story”) enough votes to become the county seat.

We highly recommend visiting the Jackson Civic Center at 33 Broadway to view the unique murals and photo exhibit which tell the history of Jackson from camp, town, to city. At this writing, the murals and photos can be seen Monday - Friday, 8:30 - 5, with some closures on Fridays.
9. WELLS HARDWARE, PIONEER HALL, 111-115 MAIN. These brick stores date from the 1850s. Both survived the awful ‘62 fire. W. C. Bussey bought these lots in 1855 and ’56 and built two brick stores. The 1862 fire gutted one and damaged the other. Hardware merchant Charles Wellier bought out Bussey and unified the facade. Continue northerly.

10. LEM’S SALOON, 169-175 MAIN. It arose about 1898 in Jackson’s Victorian architectural era. At street level, a store; above, a dwelling. A historic Chinese Masonic building was erected nearby in 1875. In early days, both sides of Main down to near Court Street were the Chinese mercantile and residential section. Cross the street to the four-story building.

11. KRABBEHOFT BUILDING, 204 MAIN. At Main and California stands this four-story concrete building erected in 1931. No one has measured whether it or the Oddfellows Hall is actually taller. For a decade or longer, old Jackson High School played its basketball games on an upper story court. It now houses several enterprises. The first Catholic Church site is north of the Krabbenhoft at the southeastern corner of North and Main, where the parking lot is. The rude, dirt-floored church was built by 1852. Its cemetery was nearby. Continue on the easterly Main sidewalk, cross California, and continue.

12. SANGUINETTI BUILDING, 136-140 MAIN. Benjamin Sanguinetti erected the first story in 1869 after fires in 1862 and ’69 destroyed wooden stores. Its second story went up in 1892 but only on the northerly part of the building. The rest is a false-front facade. A candy store was here for nigh 100 years. The Sanguinetti Building is bound northerly by a pedestrian walkway, historically known as Fletcher Alley, after Hugh Fletcher whose dwelling stood there in the 1850s.

13. MINER’S RESTAURANT & EXCHANGE, 126-28 MAIN. Wooden stores stood here in the early 1850s. Frenchmen had a bowling alley before 1857. It was Miner’s Restaurant & Exchange when the 1862 fire roared through. Merchants named S. Brandt and Witte erected this two-story brick classical revival in 1863. Renovated and re-fitted in 1873, it housed a sausage factory in 1898 and a shoe store in the 1980s. The first story facade was remodeled, maybe around 1925.

14. STAMPFLY’S TENT, REPUBLIC HOUSE, 114-118 MAIN. No longer a hotel, the first two stories of this brick building date from 1858. Owner Pat Dwyer added the third story in 1896. A vintage photo (c. 1880) shows the two-story hotel with covered balconies on the front and southerly side walls. Perhaps the site’s first use was for Stampfly’s tent in 1851-1856. It was renamed Panama House, then Republic House by 1858 and the Globe by 1872. Though totally gutted, the two-story hotel survived the 1862 fire. Continue southerly across Court St.

15. STECKERL BLDG, 48 MAIN. This historic corner below the former courthouse was first a “county clerk’s shanty” when Jackson’s Creek became county seat in 1851. In the mid-1850s, Charles Steckerl erected a two-story brick. It succumbed to the ‘62 fire, but was rebuilt. Upstairs from 1854 to 1862 was the Jackson’s Masonic Lodge. The Oddfellows also used the hall until they bought their own building down the street.

16. S. HARRIS CLOTHING STORE, 42 MAIN. A corral first, then Morris Harris came in ’53 and opened a frame store. It was cindered by the town’s epic fire. A newspaper tells us S. Harris was probably finishing a two-story brick in June, 1863, selling shoes and clothing. From 1882 on, it was Abramofsky’s cigar factory. Note the second floor, balcony and brick facade atop it. Most likely those iron shutters are original. Continue south on Main.

17. M. HARRIS CLOTHING STORE, 38 MAIN. About 20 years ago, owners Trassare restored the facade closer to its 1854 style. With the Masonic Hall and part of the Fixary building at 29-33 Main, they are the only known stores built in the county’s birth year, 1854. The brickwork for the store and its northerly neighbor (later destroyed) “was laid in 21 days in November” that year. Continue south.


19. TELLIER’S SALOON & HANGING TREE, 22-28 MAIN. Town settler Louis Tellier set up his first tent saloon on this site. Tellier called his bistro St. Louis House, Empire Saloon or Tellier’s. A nearby sidewalk plaque memorializes Jackson’s notorious tree from which ten men were hanged between 1851 and ’55. The tree itself was so severely damaged in the great fire that townspeople had to take it down. Continue south.

20. UNION HOTEL, I.O.O.F. HALL, 4-14 MAIN. Someone once deemed it the “tallest three-story building in creation,” albeit inside it seems five stories or levels. The lodge in 1904 added a story atop the old Union House hotel. With such a name, wouldn’t Union diehards opt to parade and celebrate amid torch-light here? Street-level from circa 1870 until 1919, Wells, Fargo & Co. was here. The prominent “1855” date stone only means the lodge was founded then. Go to the corner.

21. DR. SHARP’S DRUGS, GINOCCHIO’S STORE, 2 MAIN. This elongated brick building fronting both Main and Water Streets is another survivor of the 1862 fire. Dr. Sharp built and opened a new brick drug store there in 1856. In 1857 Wells, Fargo & Co. briefly rented space probably why it was called the Wells Fargo Club and Restaurant from about 1950 on. The next section or two of brickwork on the Water Stree side marks the Italian market lot, from Corraus’s store in 1851, to E. Bruno & Co. and eventually Ginocchio’s. The latter firm operated the whole building when it dissolved around 1950.