

March 2026 Meeting

As many of you all know, the cities and towns, mountains, rivers and natural parts of California are influenced by the Spanish. Even many areas have names from native Californians. However, quite a few places, creeks and towns owe their names to the 49ers. The following is a fun little story of the miner's humor from a book by the title of "Valley To The High Sierra" by Joe Smith.

Camp Names Reflected Actions

From one end of the Mother Lode to the other the rollicking 49ers left the brand of their humor on the hillsides, the bars, gulches, and ravines where they dug their gold.

Argonauts had what every man who faces danger and hardship must have - a sense of humor and the ability to laugh at himself and his trials.

A transplanted Missourian with a tuneless violin was responsible for Fiddletown. Hangtown got its name honestly for stamping out dishonests. The charming town of Lone

began as Bedbug for obvious reasons, and Poker Flat, Whiskey Flat, Murder's Bar and Delirium Tremens earned their captivating appellations by the uncurbed proclivities of their early inhabitants.

A bartender with an abnormally large thumb and forefinger was admonished to "Pinch 'em tight" when he extracted gold dust from a miner's poke, and Pinchtight became a noted camp. A prospector whose clothes were stolen by Indians continued his quest for gold only in his nightshirt, and the rich diggings of Shirttail Canyon was the result.

Other camps like Humbug, Drytown, Poverty Flat, Temperance Flat and Pulpit Bar were other indications of argonauts caprice.

And of course there was Fragrant Gulch.

Late in the fall of 1849, Casey Bunn paused by a stream while en route to Angels Camp – named for a gold seeker variously identified as George and Henry Angel, and not for the celestial being or cherubic character of the inhabitants – and he picked idly at the gravel with his stubby fingers, jabbed at it with the heel of his boot and uncovered a 5 pound nugget.

By spring Bunn had a sizable poke, and half-thousand canvas shacks and log huts were strung along both sides of the gulch, providing shelter for four times that many miners.

The boys kept so busy panning that they didn't even bother to name their settlement, although they did elect Casey as accolade - the Spanish equivalent of mayor and justice of the peace.

One evening just as dusk was settling down in the gulch, he climbed into the cabin and, while feeling around on the table for a candle, stepped on something that moved, he dived head first through the paneless window.

In his haste, Casey hadn't taken into account the width of his girth, he was stuck half in, half out. His anguished yells echoed up and down the gulch. Friends hastened to his assistance. It required much prying and pulling and loss of hide but Casey finally was extracted.

That night in Pete Hubbard's board and canvas saloon, the boys at long last settled on a name for their camp - Fragrant Gulch.

But Casey, the mayor, judge, and founder, was not there when the decision was made. He had been banished temporarily for the good of all concerned.

The "something" on which he had stepped in the darkness of his cabin had been an adventurous and, perhaps, lonely striped woods kitty which resented being trampled on.

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