



Ridge Route Communities
MUSEUM
& Historical Society

Winter 2023

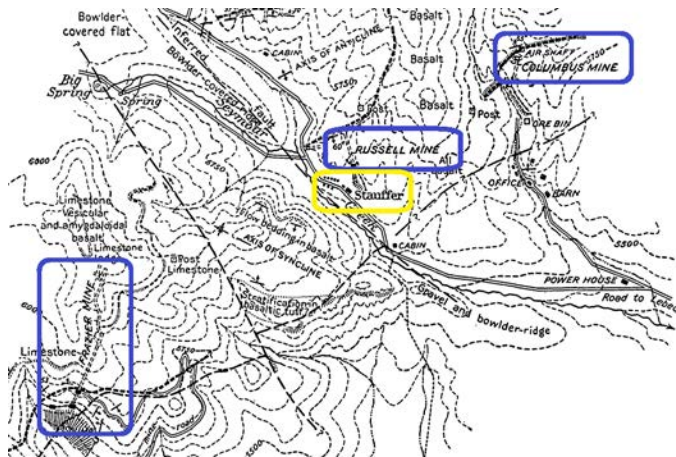
The Ridge Route Rambler

We're nuts  about history.

LOCKWOOD BORAX MINES

Colemanite, a borate mineral that can be made into Borax, was first discovered in Death Valley, CA in 1882; and the next year in Calico (near Barstow, CA). In 1889, a prospector named McLaren is said to have figured out what others thought was "lime", was in fact Colemanite.

125 years ago... In 1898, both the Frazier [Borax] Mine (Sterling Borax Co.) sites between Seymour and Bitter Creeks and the Russell Mine (Russell Borate Mining Co.) in Seymour Creek were discovered.



By 1899 both mines were producing, and another (the Columbus Mine) had been discovered by B.F. Stevens in the interest of Calm Bros. of Los Angeles.

The deposits were found in an outcropping of rock that extended from southwest to northeast, from the head of the Cuyama River along the southern flank of Mount Pinos, to the southern edge of Kern County along the Cuddy Valley.

Thomas Thorkildsen, son of a Danish immigrant, quit his job at Pacific Coast Borax (later U.S. Borax) at the age of 29 in 1898 and invested his life savings (\$17,000) into a Borax mine on Frazier Mountain.

Stephen Mather, who also worked at Pacific Coast Borax (until 1903) helped his friend (Thorkildsen) with Frazier Mine, to form Thorkildsen-Mather Borax Company, which would become Sterling Borax Co. in 1905. By then Thorkildsen had also purchased for \$80,000 a borax claim in Tick Canyon (Santa Clarita Valley), which by 1908 was operational at an annual profit of \$500,000.

The June 8, 1900 Ventura Free Press speaks of the Stauffer Chemical Company & Pacific Borax Company being large consumers of oil. Stauffer Chemical was started by John Stauffer and joined by John Wheeler. They had an agreement with Pacific Coast Borax to make boric acid. In 1901 Stauffer acquired the Frazier Mine.



8-Mules & 2-Horses Stauffer's Mt. Frazier, CA colemanite mine (c1900) - 130-miles to Bakersfield

The tiny hamlet of Stauffer is shown at the base of the Russell Mine. It is noted in the August 25, 1905 *Morning Free Press* that the *Griffin Post Office in northern Ventura County has been discontinued. A new post office name, Stauffer, has been established nearer to the Borax mines.* The name existed into the late 1960s.

1907 saw both the Frazier and Columbus Mines close; the Russell Mine was still producing in 1912.

In 1911, Pacific Coast Borax bought Sterling Borax Works from Mather and Thorkildsen for \$1.8 million; PCB operated Sterling Borax as a separate division

with Thorkildsen as president and Mather as vice president.



Borax mine, Lockwood Valley, Ventura Co., No. 1 "Shaft House on the property of the Russell Borate Mining Company, in Lockwood Valley"

By 1913, Pacific Coast Borax chief Francis Marion "Borax" [King] Smith was financially overextended; and relinquished assets to creditors. Pacific Coast Borax eventually absorbed by U.S. Borax.



Russell Borate Mine, c 1915

Thorkildsen & Mather were millionaires by 1914. Mather would go on to be the first director of the National Park Service (1917-1929). He is also credited with the "20 Mule Team Borax" label while at Pacific. Thorkildsen spent his income, buying 6 acres in what would become Beverly Hills. From a site at the hilltop end of Alpine Drive he had a 20-room mansion (that actress Carol Burnett would later tear down). After a series of scandals he bought a small yacht and embarked on a world cruise. By 1923, the mine and money ran out. He died in 1950.

MORE LOCKWOOD MINING NEWS

Other forms of mining had been taking place in the area prior to the Borax [Colemanite] discovery in 1898. In the fall of 1894 the Visalia Times-Delta ran the following stories.

Lockwood Valley Mines

[Pub: 25-Oct] Tejon Canyon, October 14, 1894.

Sir: I will endeavor this evening to inform the readers of the Times as to the prospect of our gold hunt. We came into the gold region this afternoon. The name of this deserted country is Lockwood valley. It is about six miles long and about three miles wide, covered with sagebrush. The snow falls about four feet deep in the winter here. Some men are taking up land here. They have to dig about 200 feet for water. The elevation is 5400 feet above the sea level. The mountains are nothing but a bed of ashes, covered with pomona and juniper.

Today we climbed to the top of Mt. Frazier and found several quartz mines. Out of one piece of quarts we got as high as 500 colors. This mountain is covered with round, washed gravel and plenty of signs of old volcanoes, earthquakes and mountain slides. There is one mine called the Esperanza that the ore went for as high as \$150 per ton. We will give our readers more of Lockwood valley as we come to it. Respectfully yours, M.M.

In the Mining Region

[Pub: 14-Nov] Ventura County, Cal., Nov. 12, 1894

Sir: As I promised to give the Times my rambles in the Lockwood valley county, I will process. We have prospected this country and have some good prospects in the placer mines, but the scarcity of water now prevents placer mining from being carried on very extensively. In fact, there is no placer mining being done at present.

We would advise those who want to go to Lockwood valley to prospect to go in midsummer or take an overcoat alone.

There is a lot of deer sign here but we only got a few shots at them.

Mr. Sneeding [sic, Snedden (assumed)], the big cattle man in this valley, is cutting hay here now but is not making much headway as he can not go to work until 10 or 11 o'clock on account of the heavy frosts. The hay will not be fed to the horse but he says he will make cow feed of it, and I assure you

he will need all the cow feed he can get. The cattle are so poor they can hardly stand up now. They are just barely living. They browse on sagebrush, but many of them will die.

Tomorrow we leave Lockwood valley en route for Little Poso creek to prospect that part of the country. I remain respectfully yours, M. M.

OUR RECENT MUTAU FLATS TOUR

On September 30 we had our first public tour of Mutau Flats. About 50 showed up in over a dozen cars, trekking the 11.4 miles back into the forest.

The Snedden Ranch is an inholding in the Mutau Flats area of the national forest southwest of Lockwood Valley that has been owned by the Sneddens for the past 150 years.



Condor [left], small Bear [above/middle], large Bear [right]

Near the original homestead is a rock outcropping that has some wonderful Chumash pictographs.



Our group Inside the Snedden Family home listening to history of the area.

A special thanks to Cathy Snedden Williams & Laura Hanley and the rest of the Snedden family for allowing us to tour their ranch; thank you.

MORE GORMAN SCHOOL NEWS

A while back we received a wonderful addition to the Gorman School file at the museum. Prior to receiving the photo below, we at the museum did not know that the building in this photo existed. It came to us 100 years after the date on the photo. The note was written by Lloyd Ralphs, the oldest child of Oscar and Mary Ralphs (the founders of the Ralphs "dynasty") and read: "Elsie first job¹. Gorman, Calif., Ridge Route, 8000 ft. elevation², Lloyd Ralphs" and below that was written, in the same handwriting: "1923 Elsie M. Palmer".



The photo was sent to us by Elsie's granddaughter, Ann Andrews Morris, who wrote: "I found the attached photo in my late grandmother's belongings and thought it might be of interest/value to you. She was a remarkable woman having earned two Bachelor's degrees at Ohio State University in 1922." Elsie's married name was Andrews.

Some wonder if there might have been a romantic connection between Elsie and Lloyd as they would have been about the same age. Or she might just have asked him to send her a photo of the school at which she first taught. There was a Palmer family in the area – possibly distant relatives of Elsie? Obviously some of the Ralphs family children went to school there before the present school was opened in 1939. We are pretty sure we have found

¹ presumably as a schoolteacher

² 8000 ft. is questionable since the current pass at the nearby Interstate today is only 4,144 ft.

where this building was located by matching the hills behind it in the photo.

If anyone has old photos, report cards or such from a family member that might have attended this Gorman school in the 1920's and 30's we hope you would share them with our museum. We urge our readers to allow us to review your old family photos if they spent some time in our mountain area. They are as good as gold to us.

PARTIAL ECLIPSE EVENT REPORT



A big thank you to Callista Turner from Hungry Valley SVRA and her volunteers who helped us put on our Solar Eclipse Program on October 14th.



Starting at 8am we had tables setup with information, eclipse glasses to give out and a telescope to look through. By totallitaly we had over 50 people stop by and watch the sun get eclipsed by the moon.



RESIDENT PASSES AVAILABLE

We have MC Chamber of Commerce's **Resident Passes** available for \$6 in store.

NEED A UNIQUE EVENT VENUE?

Looking for a unique venue for your event? Have your next event at the Museum. Contact us for details. We even have great parking for you to use.

DECEMBER LIGHTS

Our amazing lighting director Sydney Croasmun and her crew did an awesome job setting up our December Lights. We have received many positive comments from the public about the display. Everyone loved this year's lights. Great Job!



La Cañada de Las Uvas

252 Years ago, Don Pedro Fages passed through La Cañada de Las Uvas (Grapevine Canyon) on his way traveling from San Diego to San Luis Obispo via Cajón Pass, Mojave Desert, Hughes Lake, Antelope Valley, Tejón Pass, Cañada de los Uvas (Grapevine Canyon), and Buena Vista Lake. That was In **1772**.



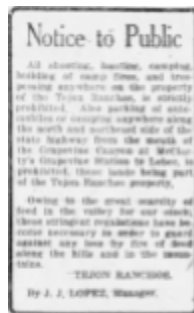
1853 Railroad Map (Grapevine Canyon)

100 Years ago, Leonard Lawrence McLarty, owner of Grapevine Station, became the postmaster of the new **Grapevine, CA** post office on July 12, 1923, and continued until his death on July 19, 1935.



McLarty, opened a garage/gas station/cafe at the base of the "famous" Grapevine Grade in **1919**; according to Harrison Irving Scott's *The Road that United California*. In 1921 L.L. McLarty of Grapevine is listed as a dealer of Diamond Tires according to an ad in the Bakersfield Morning Echo of February 20, 1921.

Also 100 Years ago, **Tejon Ranch** (then Tejon Ranchos) made reference to **McClarty's Grapevine Station** in this public notice printed in the Tuesday, August 28, 1923 (Pg 4) edition of the Bakersfield Morning Echo.



90 Years ago, The Bakersfield Californian in the January 2, 1933 edition noted that you can get the

paper in Grapevine at McLarty's Store. This continued until 1944. In 1945 the paper was now being listed as at Spears Service Station in Grapevine.

"POTHOLE PROJECT" APPROVED

The **Ridge Route Preservation Organization** (RRPO) was cleared by the Angeles National Forest to repair potholes along the north section of the Old Ridge Route from the 138 to the Tumble Inn.

The intent is to preserve the road and make it more accessible to the public as well as emergency services. Filling the potholes can reinforce crumbling sections of the road as well as prevent further damage to the original road surface.

The Ridge Route Pothole Project will begin in spring of 2024.

These improvements don't only serve to protect the history of the Ridge Route, the repairs will also serve everyone who passes through the area. It's a large stretch of open land that provides recreation for hikers, cyclists and hunters as well as being a heavy fire danger area. It's important that emergency vehicles have quick and easy access when mere seconds matter.

A donation of \$15 buys a 50 pound bag of asphalt cold patch.

For volunteer and donation info visit our Project website ridgeroute.org/pothole-project/.

SIGNIFICANT DONORS

Thank you to Judy Steinhoff Lawson, Tony Waters, Tom Runions (Holland Family) for their very kind donations. We also thank Lynette Lame for her gift to our Building Fund.

Lastly, thank you Wm. (Tony) Waters for sponsoring our December Lights display, which made it possible for us to replace most of our incandescent lights with LED and solar.

EVENT & BOARD MEETING CALENDAR

Nothing much, in **January** or **February** other than our annual Staff (or "Volunteer") Appreciation Dinner, and the **Board Meetings** January 17 and February 21.

Basket weaving classes are back, starting with **Rib Baskets** on **March 9** and **Pine Needle Basket Weaving** on **March 16**.

The March **Board Meeting** will be **March 20**.

Followed by an **Egg Decorating Class, March 23**.

April has a **Book Folding Class** on April 13, turning a book into a decorative birdcage. Spring welcomes a **Ridge Route Road Tour** on **April 20**.

Saturday April 27 will be the museum's first **Spring Crafts Fair**. Highlighting the crafts done in the prior classes, we will be holding a judging contest. We will also offer **booths to vendors wanting to market their homemade arts and crafts**.

Another **Ridge Route Road Tour** will be held on **May 4**.

Join us at the **Ridge Route Run Car Show, May 25**.

In **June** our very popular **Patio Programs** return every **Saturday in June (1, 8, 15, 22 & 29)**. We will update our speaker list as we get them confirmed.

July 27 will be the return of our most attended and looked-forward-to event, the annual dramatic reading of **Heap of Livin'**.

We will be looking forward to your **Yard Sale** donations starting in August, and volunteers to help sorting and getting ready for the **Great American Yard Sale Saturday August 30, Sunday September 1 & Monday the 2nd**.

The Fall will offer 2- 3 **Ridge Route Road Tours**, stay tuned for exact dates, but we are thinking one in late September and two in October.

October 26, Night at the Museum may make a ghost appearance.

November may hold a Corn Husk Wreath Class, but let's wait on that for now, And next **December** is too far away to know anything for.

All Classes and Tours are paid private events, costing \$20 per person.

All **Programs** and other things (**Heap of Livin' & Yard Sale**) are **free and open to the public**.

Unless noted otherwise, all events are held on Saturday. **Board Meetings** are held on the **3th Wednesday of the month, 2pm at the Museum** and are **free and open to the public**.

YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Thank you to our 52 subscribers.

Visit youtube.com/@RidgeRouteMuseum.

NEW TO OUR BOARD

We welcome David Carlson, our newest board member. Thank you for your service.

NEWSLETTER

CORRECTION: In the last issue we listed a photo credit as "Le Me", it should have been credited as: Lesli Meyers. Our Apologies.

Editors:

G Rick

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WHO IS JAMES ESPI?

If you have any information, we have a mystery for you. On Forest Rte 7N03 we found this marker, It's a wooden cross with the name **James Espi & 1961 - 2001** etched in it. Do you know this person? Can you shed light on this mystery? If so, contact us.



CONTACT OR VISIT US

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Phone: 661-245-7747

Website: ridgeroutemuseum.org
Email: info@ridgeroutemuseum.org



FRAZIER PARK LICENSE PLATE FRAME

We only have a few left, get one before they are gone FOREVER, \$30 each.



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David Carlson
Hugh James (Jamie) Crawford
Barbara Bouman Jay
Kenna Mattox
G Rick

For the record, two of the Museum board members are also on the RRPO board.

RIDGE ROUTE COMMUNITIES MUSEUM & HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 684
FRAZIER PARK, CA 93225

**PLEASE CHECK YOUR
LABEL FOR MEMBERSHIP
RENEWAL DATE!**