



# The History of Camp Augusta

by Marge Kaiser, M.A. 530-265-6649

[margekaiser@att.net](mailto:margekaiser@att.net)

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*Gypsy Falls (Fig. 1)*

## Introduction to Camp Augusta History

During the past 14 years of leading hikes at Camp Augusta, I began to notice interesting artifacts, ditches, ponds, mounds and other evidence of early mining. For example, for those of you who have been to Camp Augusta, if you go down to “Hot Rocks” you will see iron posts embedded in the rocks. These are the supports from the bridge on the old stagecoach road that led to North San Juan. If you walk down to Gypsy Falls, where you cross the wooden bridge above the creek, you will notice the irregularity of dips and mounds below the bridge. These are evidence of what was called coyote mining – the use of pick axes in the side of the hill. On the Falls side of the bridge there is an old ditch that winds around the side of the hill and can also be seen on the upper trail near the Archery range. This ditch carried water as did many wooden flumes and water diversions for the early gold miners. The frog pond is an early water diversion. These early

water diversions were for mining gold in Rock Creek and later expanded to be used for hydroelectric power.

When it came time to write the history of Camp Augusta, it seemed to be an incomplete history if I began the story with the birth of the camp as a place for Camp Fire girls. The land upon which Camp Augusta sits has been in the eye of a storm of creativity for over 150 years - a magical dream driven property from the get-go. You will see how the usage of the land on Rock Creek and around Lake Vera progressed from placer mining to hydraulic mining, to the first hydroelectric power in Northern California and eventually to the adventurous camp it is today - all created by some of the most incredible and famous leadership in the history of California.

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From the very beginning Camp Augusta and the land upon which it sits has been all about dreams. In the beginning the dream was of gold and the early gold was found at Rock Creek. Camp Augusta is on Rock Creek right at the heart of where the early mining began. Thus, the history of Camp Augusta begins with the history of the Gold Rush and thanks to a diary left behind by an early Argonaut, Alfred T. Jackson of Connecticut, who placer mined on Rock Creek beginning in October 1849; we have a first-hand description of what life was like on Rock creek in Nevada County California during that time. (1)

Mr. Jackson and a partner had a claim on Rock Creek from 1849 to June of 1852 where they took out many ounces of gold, enough to buy up most of North Beach in San Francisco and still send money home to their families. Immigrants arrived in great numbers all searching for gold along the rivers, creeks, and streams. Rock Creek and Brush Creek were worked extensively for placer gold, primarily in 60 foot square claims. These areas were to produce millions of dollars of gold. So much gold was taken out of Rock Creek, that at one time, the area was more populated with miners' tents and cabins than Caldwell's Upper Store, which later became Nevada City. (2)



*Mining on Rock Creek, Nevada County (Figure 2)*

From the beginning Rock Creek attracted some of California's most prominent citizens. Many had studied law or went on to establish successful enterprises throughout the region. Well known locals included such luminaries as Niles Searles, Tom Williams, Frank Dunn and Stanton Buckner, all members of the bar. As they made their fortunes, some returned to the East where they built a new life. More stayed on the west coast and the money that came out of Rock Creek helped finance San Francisco and the East Bay. (1)

It should be noted that all the hustle and bustle of the gold rush was not appreciated by the people who were here first, namely the Nisenan Indians. According to the Lake Vera/Round Mountain Association Neighborhood Plan of 1995, the original inhabitants of this area were Nisenan, Southern Maidu speaking people, who had lived here for several thousand years. They were hunter-gatherers, living in small villages but moving with the seasons as the crops of their natural foods matured. "The Lake Vera/Round Mountain area would have been well populated since it contained an abundance of the foods needed – fish from the creeks and rivers, deer, rabbits



*Artist's rendition of a Nisenan villager (Fig.3)*

and other game from the forest and oak trees. The many bedrock grinding sites in the area attest to the use of the acorn in the native diet. It is known that some fur trappers came to the area in the 1830's and 1840's causing a considerable loss to the native population due to the introduction of diseases for which the Nisenan had no immunity."(2)

Mining law (which was often made up on the spot) forbid Native Americans claims on the creek, thereby limiting their access to water. Between the diseases and the takeover of the land, the native way of life was over. Many were force marched to reservations, their children put in Indian schools. Estimates of the aboriginal population of Nevada County vary. However, according to Richard B. Johnson, present day Tribal Chair, there were approximately 7000 in Nevada County in 1849 and by the time of the C.E. Kelsey census of 1905/06 there were 53 left. It was a tragic time for the Nisenan, as the Europeans came west to mine for gold.(7)

The landscape was altered drastically not only by mining, but also by the extensive lumbering activities – trees were felled to provide warmth, build cabins, houses, flumes, ditches, construct mining equipment and laid as partial roadbeds. The current tree cover of Lake Vera/Rock Creek area is second and third growth timber. (2)

Ditches to carry water for mining began to criss-cross the land. The first major mining ditch was the seven mile long Rock Creek Ditch, constructed in 1850 to take water from Rock Creek to Coyote Hill in Nevada City. The Rock Creek Ditch Co. is considered to be the oldest entity on the PG&E corporate family tree. Charles Marsh, a pioneer in water development in Nevada County, and his partners built the Rock Creek Ditch for \$10,000 and recovered its' cost in six weeks from the water hungry miners who used the water to process their gold. Placer mining (mining in the water) kept adding new technologies: sluice boxes, long toms, flumes and ditches as the technology and the lust for gold increased. The ditch business then became very competitive. Rivals of Marsh built ditches from Deer Creek to Nevada City. Lawsuits about water rights led to consolidations and the Deer Creek and Coyote Water Co. in late 1851. (3)

With the advent of the ditches and a plentiful water supply, placer mining gave way to hydraulic mining and miners were able to extract gold on a much larger scale. Hydraulic mining is the use of large hoses with monitors (enormous nozzles) under intense water pressure to wash away hillsides for the purpose of gold extraction. The most obvious example of this is at Malakoff Diggins State Park approximately 10 miles northeast of Camp Augusta.



LAKE VERA - RAVINE BELOW DAM

(You can take the Lake Vera Purdon road which is the old toll road known as the North San Juan Road. This stagecoach road was a major thoroughfare to the Downieville and northern mines and between those mines and Nevada City.) Camp Augusta is riddled with ditches, tailings, and even an underground tunnel as evidence of early mining activity on Rock Creek. You

*Fig. 4 – Stage coach road near Hot Rocks, prior to dam*



can also see evidence of the old road near what is now called “hot rocks.” The old bridge over Rock Creek was supported by the iron pilings embedded in the rock. The road continued on to the flat trail above where Bee Keeping and Blacksmithing takes place now and is still visible.

The basin of Lake Vera is a result of former hydraulic mining activity. All through the 1850's to the 1870's small hydraulic mining operations blasted away at the sides of the hills and the area around Lake Vera. Eventually, the high level of hydraulic mining led to its doom. Silt and gravel from the mines were carried in muddy streams to the rivers in lower valleys. This caused flooding in areas like Marysville and Yuba City because the level of the riverbed was raised substantially. The flooding damaged farmland and destroyed the downtown. A bitter fight ensued between the farmers and the miners and came to a head in 1884, when Judge L.B. Sawyer granted a perpetual injunction forbidding the discharge of debris into the rivers. This was known as the Sawyer Act and was the first environmental legislation in the U.S., effectively putting an end to hydraulic mining. Rather suddenly the hundreds of miles of ditches had lost their biggest and best customers. Many ditches were abandoned and the ditch companies that survived focused on farming and irrigation for the next ten years. (3)



*Hydraulic mining above Lake Vera dam, same road as Fig 4 (Fig. 5)*

## Another Use for Lake Vera and Rock Creek

In 1892 Alfonso Tregidgo and Eugene J. de Sabla formed the Nevada County Electric Power Company, (later to be named Pacific Gas and Electric Company) to build an electric powerhouse on the South Yuba River. This idea of building an electric power plant was Tregidgo's idea for the purpose of providing inexpensive power to the quartz gold mines in the area, including their own Peabody Mine in Grass Valley. There were over 60 mines within a 9 mile radius. Water rights claims were made by Tregidgo. The one located at Myers Ravine, not far from Lake Vera, reads as follows

*"I Alf Tregidgo do hereby locate and claim 2000 miners inches of water on Meyer's Ravine – Nevada Co. Cal – situate in Sec 26, T.17N.R.8E immediately above the gradeline of flume of the Nevada County Electric Power Company – it is my intention to divert this water at this point and convey it to the flume of Nevada County Electric Power Company. Dated on this ground this 1<sup>st</sup> day of July 1895." Signed Alf Tregidgo, Locator.  
(Searls Historical Library, Nevada City, California)*

Tregidgo was from Cornwall, England, born in 1858. He joined the Merchant Marines and arrived in Vallejo in 1878. He worked at the St. John's quicksilver mine near Vallejo, later working in copper mines in Arizona where he became Superintendent.

Eugene de Sabla was a descendent of French nobility, born in Panama in 1865. He was educated in San Francisco as an assayist and worked in the copper mines in Arizona of which his father was part owner. It was here that he met Tregidgo. When the mine closed due to falling copper prices, de Sabla returned to San Francisco to become a full partner in his father's business. During the financial panic of 1893 de Sabla decided to liquidate his father's company. (3)

In late 1894 de Sabla was introduced to John Martin, an agent for the U.S. Cast Iron Pipe Company, at a luncheon in San Francisco. Charles W. Randall, a Mother Lode mine owner, thought that Martin might get an order to supply pipe for de Sabla's powerhouse project. Martin then went to Pittsfield, Mass. where he met William Stanley of Stanley Electrical Manufacturing Co. and persuaded him to give him the California agency for their

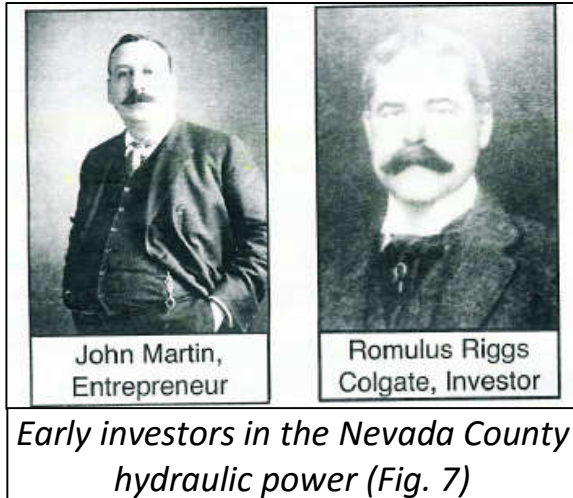


Alfonso Tregidgo (left) and Eugene J. de Sabla

*Founders of the Nevada County Electric Power Company (Fig. 6)*

products. The two men, de Sabla and Martin, then teamed up on the powerhouse project and finalized their agreement at the Nevada City's National Exchange Hotel in the hotel bar and later in de Sabla's office in Suite 74. Thus, some say that the National Hotel is the birthplace of PG&E. (3)

Enter the fourth player in the building of one of the first of northern California's early electric hydroplants – Romulus Riggs Colgate, grandson of the founder of the



Colgate Soap and Perfume company, who came west to acquire gold-mining properties in Grass Valley and Nevada City. Colgate accidentally met de Sabla who was on his way to the railway ticket agency. De Sabla was going to New York to ask his grand uncle to invest in his project. Colgate replied that he knew his uncle and then asked, "But why go to him for money? Maybe I can take his place!" Colgate then became a

\$40,000 investor for one-fifth interest in the company. (3) Here it is interesting to note that the Nevada County Power House became known as the "Rome" powerhouse, the nickname for Romulus Colgate and is called that to this day.

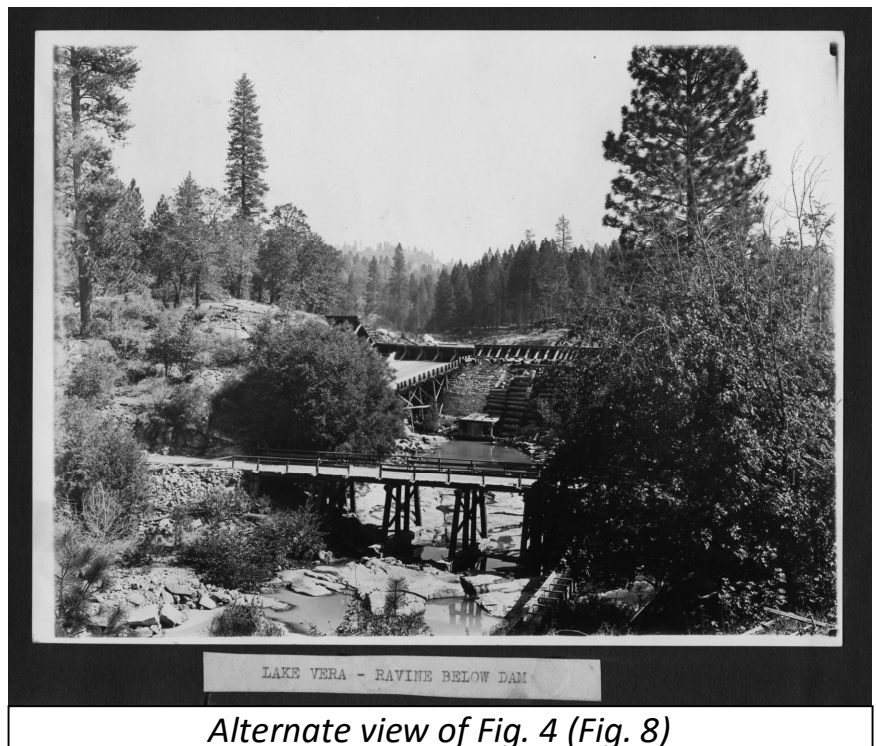
Although the incorporation of the Nevada County Electric Power Co. took place on September 22, 1892, a financial depression put the project on hold until 1895 when the first phase of the powerhouse was started and completed in early 1896. (This first phase had less impact on Lake Vera but led to a huge impact within a year.) Phase one included a diversion dam on the south Yuba River itself, referred to as the low head dam. It consisted of two Stanley generators (thanks to John Martin) and two Pelton wheels. A wood pole line was constructed 8 miles to Nevada City and Grass Valley and a three and one half mile flume to the powerhouse site. (3) On February 5, 1896 the power went on. As reported in "The Daily Transcript" the following day,

*"The electric lights of the Nevada County Electric Power Company were turned on at 6 o'clock last evening for the first time and attracted considerable attention. The lights were quite brilliant and the office of the company on Pine St. received many visitors. The lights were burned in Lane's livery stable, the Morgan House at Grass Valley and the company's office, these being the only places wired and connected thus far, but in a few days many other business places and residences will be connected and lights furnished*

*them. The officials of the company felt very much pleased over the excellent beginning made and promise that it will not be long that power, as well as lights can be furnished to all who desire it."*

The powerhouse site was in a narrow river canyon 1000 feet below the staging point. The machinery had to be brought in via rail to Nevada City from Colfax on the Nevada County Narrow Gauge Railroad and then hauled by wagon to the site. Six to 12 horse teams hauled the machinery to the staging point at the end of the road. From there, the equipment was lowered down the 1700 foot slope, "Emigrant Gap style", first on wagons, then using heavy log sleds. Generally three manila ropes were used to control the load by wrapping each several turns around a tree trunk. The generators to be installed consisted of six pieces, the heaviest weighing 11,200 pounds. The canyon was so narrow that the 10 bedroom boarding house for the men who worked at the powerhouse was built on the opposite side of the river and was reached by a suspension footbridge. (3)

De Sabla and Tregidgo bought up all the property surrounding Lake Vera and much of Rock Creek.(3) I found one transaction in the Book of Deeds, Vol. 95, pg. 84 in which "J.M. Cooper of Nevada City granted to Nevada County Electric Power Company for \$650 in gold coin... (sic) "said land being the land covered by the water in Lake Vera, on both sides of Rock Creek and in Brush Creek, the present dam being about 50 feet in height. Together with the right to raise said dam and flood additional land..." Many of the other parcels were mining claims. In another Book of Deeds, Vol. 84, pg. 53, the Central Pacific Railroad Co. granted to Nevada County Electric Power Company, 80 acres in Section 27, T17 N, R8E "reserving, however, all claim of the United States to the same as mineral land." Dated August 27, 1885.

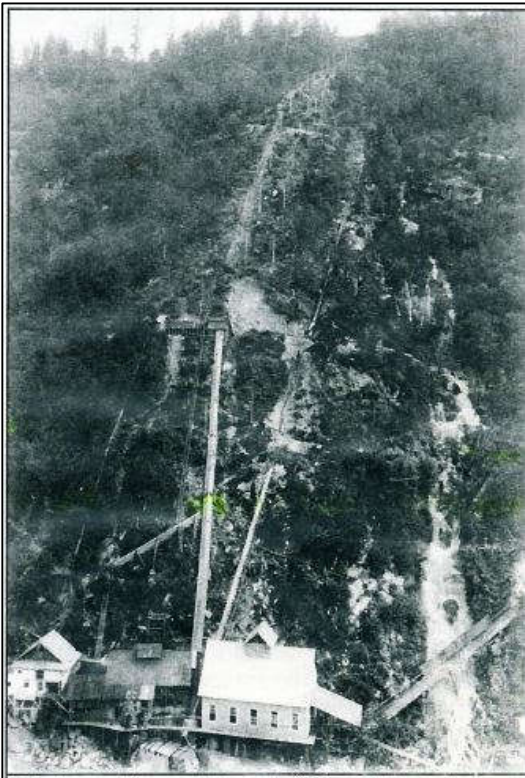


*Alternate view of Fig. 4 (Fig. 8)*



## Impact on Lake Vera

Success created more demand and Phase Two of the Rome Powerhouse project began. This consisted of delivering the South Yuba Canal water into the old Ridge Ditch, and from there into Rock Creek. The dam at Lake Vera was created to regulate the flow to the powerhouse and had a huge impact on the size of the lake and on what is now the current Camp Augusta property. A 327 foot long by 54 foot high crib dam, known as the high head dam, was started on March 1, 1898 to back up water into Lake Vera. Water



Birdseye View of Nevada "Rome" Powerhouse  
— note flume at left center to low-head PH and  
penstock from top of mountain to high-head PH

*Fig. 9*

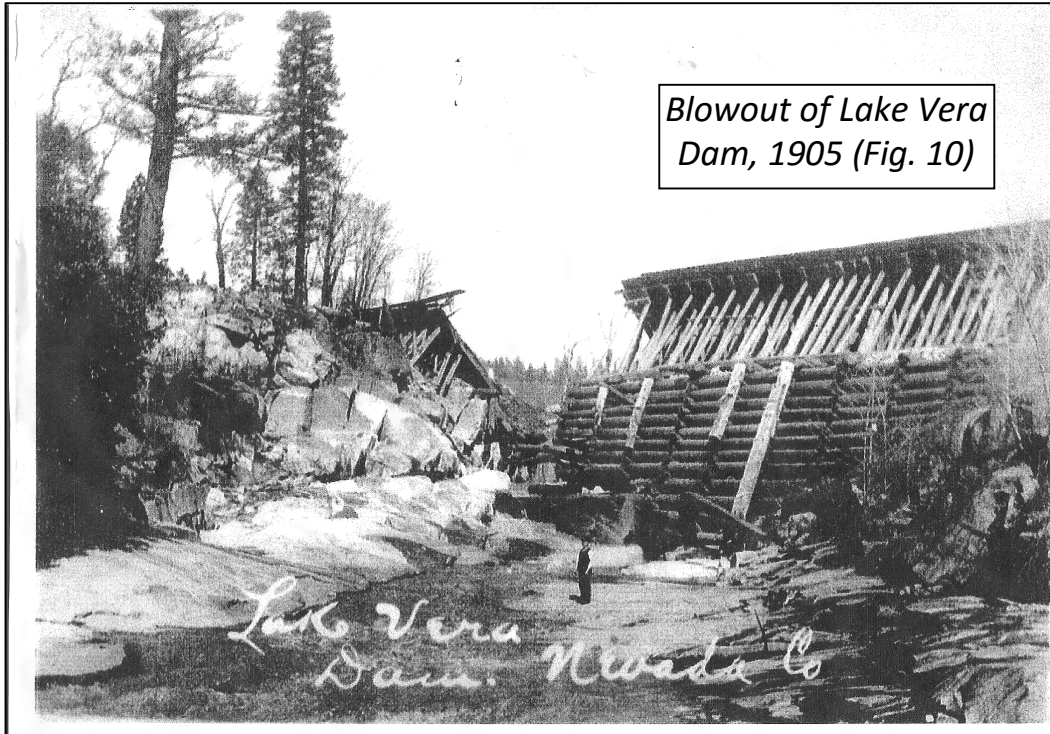
below Lake Vera on the Camp Augusta side of the dam was diverted out of Rock Creek and thru a series of ditches, flumes and penstock (pipes), across Myers Ravine to a staging point above the Yuba River, at the end of what is now Augustine Road. (3) One can only imagine what happened to Gypsy Falls during this period.

The location of the crib dam can still be seen between the property on the north side of Rock Creek and Camp Augusta above what is now called "hot rocks." The water depth of Lake Vera was increased to 52 feet deep. The new lake covered 42 acres and could furnish a constant flow of 1000 miner's inches for 30 days. The powerhouse was expanded and two more generators were added, which more than doubled the plant output. The Lake Vera viaduct was 2 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles long and had a gradient so gradual it took one hour and five minutes for water to reach the fore bay. It consisted of 2340 feet of flume, 11,200 feet of ditch (most of it an old

mining ditch) to a small fore bay on the hillside. Two thirds along the way it crossed Myers Ravine via an inverted siphon of 36 inch pipe which was 668 feet long. (3)

Lake Vera dam burst on April 2, 1905 when a large section of the crib dam gave way. Workmen stopped the flow of water with wood and cement. Afterwards, the dam operated with a 40 foot height and diminished flow capacity of 1000 miner's inches for 10 days instead of 30 days. The Nevada "Rome" power house operated for 15 years, until 1910 when it was shutdown as obsolete.

The two phase 133 cycle used at that time changed to three phase 60 cycles, the standard of today. This little powerhouse on the South Yuba River led to other projects, acquisitions and new companies culminating with the creation of Pacific Gas and Electric Company in October of 1905. Martin and de Sabla are known to this day as the “fathers of PG&E.” (3)



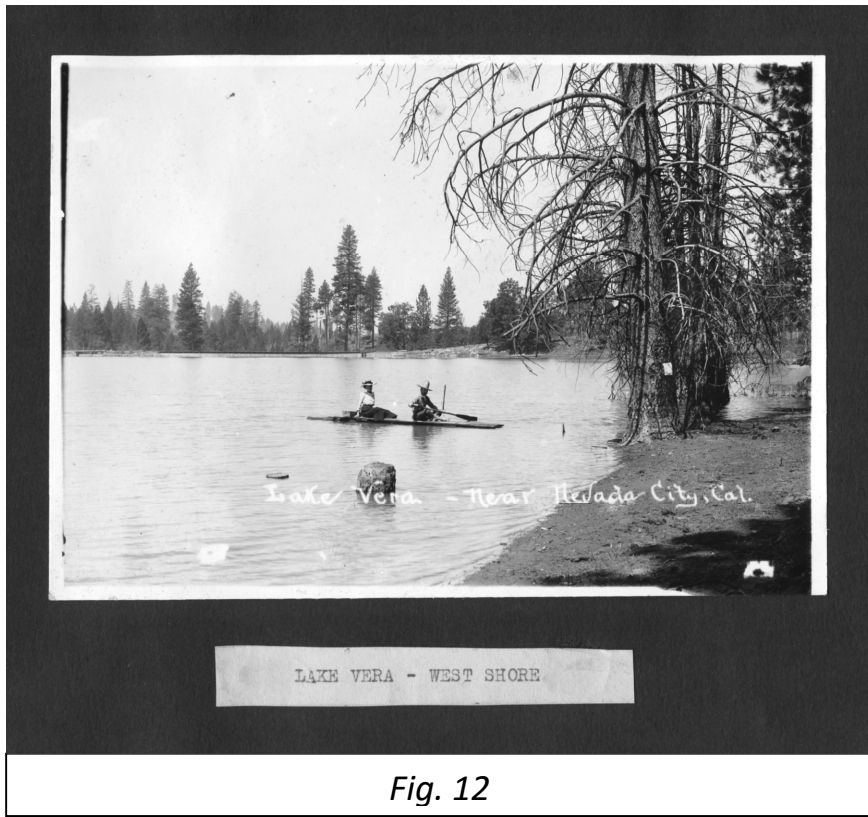
Lake Vera was named after de Sabla’s oldest daughter, who was nine years old at the time. A decade later, when Vera was twenty years old, she had the largest debutante party in San Francisco Peninsula history, costing \$16,000.



Vera de Sabla, namesake of Lake Vera (Fig. 11)

## Lake Vera Gets a Rest

For approximately the next 15 years, PG&E held onto the Lake Vera property and surrounding area. The trees grew back. The ditches became overgrown. The land received a much needed rest. The water was used mainly for agricultural purposes and local recreation.

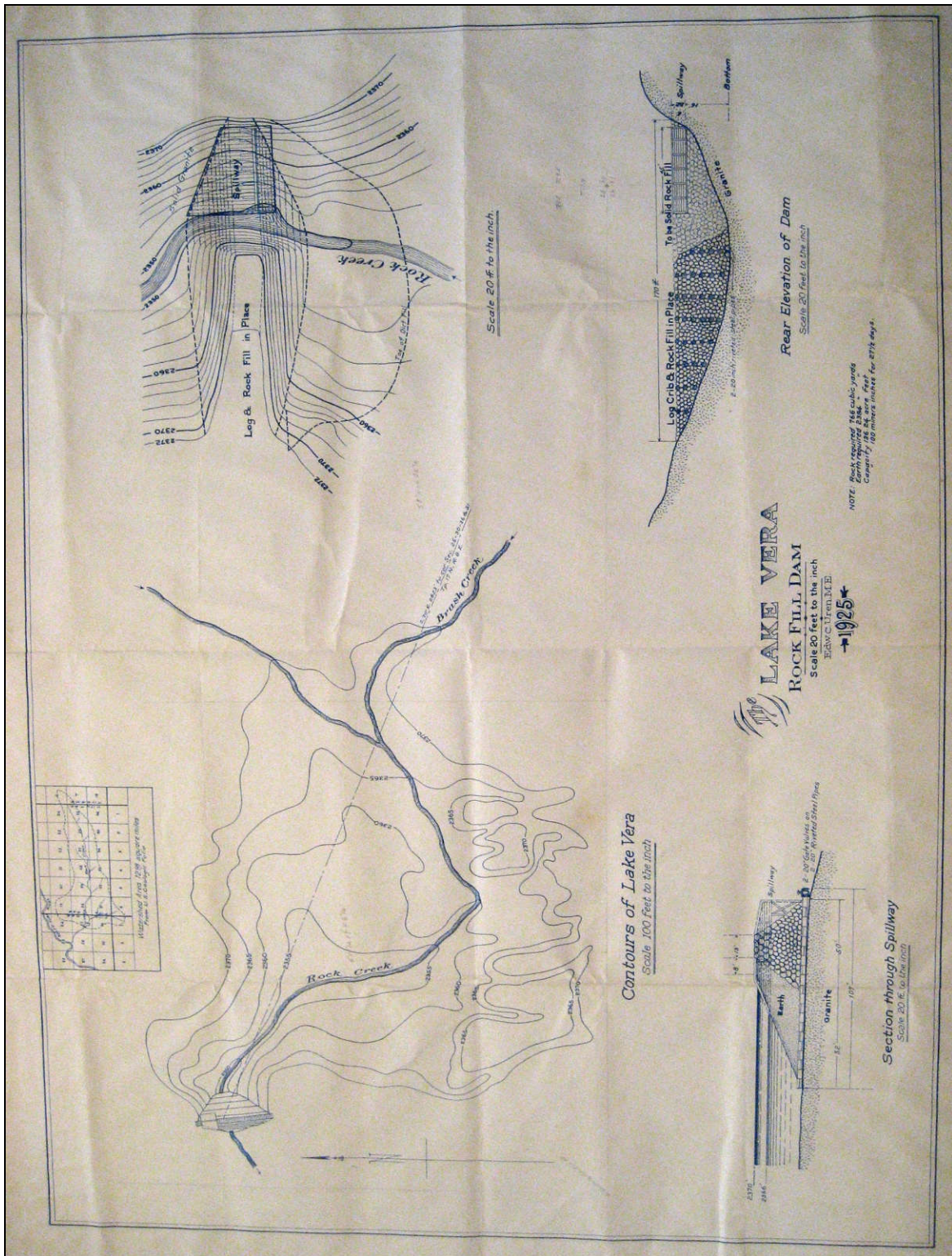


*Fig. 12*

In 1925 a new dam was designed by Edwin C. Uren, M.E. and installed on the Lake Vera side of what is currently Lake Vera-Purdon road. Remember, the current road would have been underwater when the water level was over 50 feet. In fact the water level came up to just below where the lodge is now. The new Lake Vera was 12.68 square miles area of watershed. The dam held two 20 foot gate valves and provided 100 miner's inches of water for 27 ½ days – considerably smaller than the previous lake. It also allowed

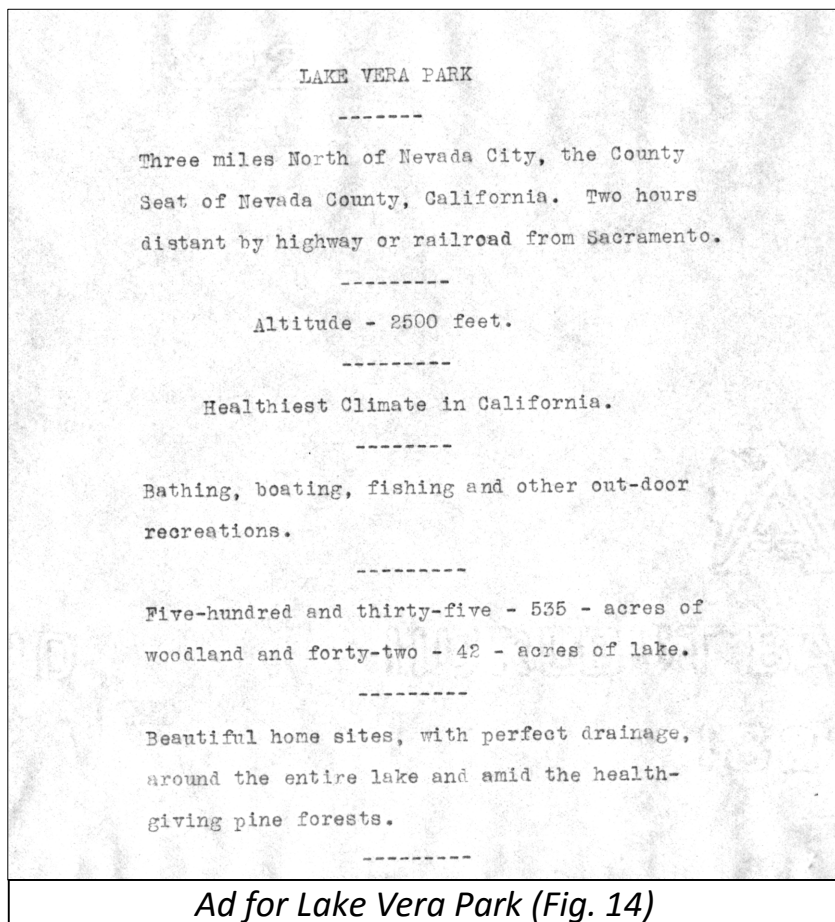
Rock Creek to flow once again and Gypsy Falls was restored. By this time, PG&E was losing interest in the property.





Relief map – Lake Vera (Fig. 13)





Another interesting document found at the Searls Historical Library was an advertisement for "Lake Vera Park," written on what appears to be an old Underwood typewriter or old newspaper typeset. It advertizes "535 acres of woodland and 42 acres of lake with beautiful home sites. Two hours distant by highway or railroad from Sacramento." If the lake still had 42 acres of water, the document would have been printed prior to the building of the new dam. In some of the deeds and photos taken around the turn of the century the area is referred to as Lake Vera Park.

By 1915 over 20,000 motorists were traveling through the Nevada City area to the mountains and commercial motor courts and their cozy individual cabins (later called motels) began to appear in the area. In the Union newspaper dated August 10, 1915, it was reported that the Board of Supervisors authorized the making of a contract with Messrs. Ed Uren and Lee Leiter, whereby they would loan the money for the building of Rector Road around Lake Vera to encourage motorists. (4)

Along about the same time a major player stepped up to the plate. His name was Fisk M. Ray, a resident of Berkeley California, graduate of UC at Berkeley in the class of 1902. Legend has it, that Lake Vera was becoming a burden for PG&E and they were anxious to be rid of it. Riding a train between Chicago and San Francisco, Mr. Ray is reported to have won Lake Vera and the surrounding lands in a poker game. (It is not reported which principal from PG&E he was playing with.) The subsequent deed reads, interestingly enough, "*the real property hereby conveyed is not necessary or useful to said first party (PG&E) in the performance by it of its duties to the public.*" There is no mention of money exchanged. (Official Records, Vol. 22, pg. 69.)

Fisk M. Ray had a partner, W.H. Griffith, a bachelor who was an attorney from Pennsylvania. He died in 1939 while living at the National Hotel and is buried in the Pine Grove cemetery in Nevada City. He was 82. All of the deeds to Fisk M. Ray are deeded equally to W.H. Griffith, but I could find very little information about him. Fisk M. Ray lived in Berkeley and attended the Unitarian church. He died of cancer on November 12, 1936 on the day the Bay Bridge opened to traffic. He had lost much of his fortune.

It should be noted here that Eugene de Sabla had built a cabin on Lake Vera during the time he was building the Nevada County Electric Power Company. Fisk M. Ray obtained the de Sabla cabin with the PG&E deeds and retained the property for summer vacations while he lived in Berkeley. The little cabin is still there on the South shore of Lake Vera and has stayed in the family to present date. Mr. Ray's granddaughter, Marcie Ellers tells of many happy memories in that cabin. She remembers being told that the cabin used to be closer to the lake than it is now. No doubt, with the lake levels rising and later falling to the present level, the cabin was closer to the lake - or rather the lake was closer to the cabin. Marcie Ellers also attended Camp Augusta as a child, coming up from the East Bay.

Beginning in the fall of 1927, the Nevada City Chamber explored the possibility of buying property to create a summer camp for Camp Fire Girls from the Bay Area. The idea was that while hundreds of young girls assembled each summer at the camp, their parents would bring them here, come back to take them home and perhaps even find time for an occasional visit. That meant more visitors and more money spent in local shops and hotels. (4)

In January 1928 the Nevada City Chamber announced that it was going to purchase 20 acres at Lake Vera and donate the land to the Oakland Camp Fire Girls. This would have been the first camp on Lake Vera. Two weeks later William Celio and his son, Gove, who owned a grocery store at the foot of Broad Street, decided to relieve the chamber of the expense. They purchased the 20 acres and deeded it over to the Oakland scouting organization, paving the way for camping for local and East Bay Girls.(4)

In a PG&E document "Valuation of County Lands" dated September 18, 1930, there is a description of Lake Vera and surrounding lands. The dam is described as 300 feet long, 1 foot thick and averages about 7 feet high. It goes on to say *"Rock Creek forms a deep rugged canyon, part of which is a basin and slopes gently to the lake. Second growth*

pine and brush, sandy granite foundation, no good for grazing, fencing negligible, recreational value, yes." (paraphrased) Date purchased December 2, 1897, purchase price \$400.00. There is an enclosed map that shows "Mills College Camp and Cottage" and a section on the opposite side of the lake marked as "Sacramento Camp Fire Girls Camp." By 1930 the precedent of Lake Vera as a recreational area for summer camps for girls had been established.

1897

Acres: 340-501d444  
Appraisal: 9150  
Improvements: 2025.00  
Timber: 6100

**PACIFIC GAS AND ELECTRIC COMPANY**  
**VALUATION OF COUNTRY LANDS**

PAC. GAS & ELEC. CO.  
S. & S. F. PWR. CO.  
MT. SHASTA PWR. CORP.  
NOVATO U. CO.  
SNOW MT. W. & P. CO.

Sec. 25  
Twp. 17 N. Range 9 E  
B. and M. 16.7  
County Nevada  
Division DCH20

Land Appraisal by Smithwick & G. H. Skene Date Sept 18 1930  
Timber Cruise by H. K. Keesee Date Oct 23 1921

Date Purchased 12-2-97  
Purchase Price 400.00

Operation or Non-Operative? NON-OPERATIVE  
If Operative, how used?  
Topography: Rock Creek Canyon deep rugged canyon through SW 1/4 - SE 1/4 of SE 1/4 in Chain 1 & 2 of NE 1/4 of section gently to Lake  
Vegetation: 20% brush & pine & brush - balance SW 1/4  
Soil: Granite formation - sandy  
Cultivation, character and extent: none  
Tillable land not cultivated, what portion and how much? none  
Water available (or projected) for power development, irrigation, stock or domestic purposes: Rock Creek  
Summer or Winter range, or both: No good for grazing  
Carrying capacity: Length of Season:  
Cost per acre of clearing agricultural land:  
Rental value:  
Minerals or substances of economic value: none  
Recreational value? Yes  
Are there recreational areas in vicinity? Yes

APPRaisalMENT (EXCLUSIVE OF SAW TIMBER, IMPROVEMENTS, AND MINERAL)

Subdivision	Acres	Per Acre	Value	Wood—Cords	Wood Value	Total Value
SE 1/4 of SE 1/4 of SE 1/4	125.60	50	6280	Recreational		
Balance SW 1/4	15.0	5	750	"		
Sub-total			6930			
Commission and Surveying			245			
<b>Total</b>	<b>275.6</b>	<b>20.03</b>	<b>7175</b>			

Improvements—Description (Including Fences) Concrete dam about 300' long 1ft thick  
(fencing negligible)  
Condition and necessary repairs:  
Total Value of Improvements: No

PG&E Valuation of Country Lands, 1921 (Fig. 15)

## Camp Augusta

In one of the deeds for Piedmont Girls Community Services (the earlier name for Piedmont Camp Fire Girls), I found the following fascinating description of what was required to have a camp at Lake Vera. It reads *“for the benefit and protection of the lands bordering on and adjacent to Lake Vera, now or hereafter devoted primarily to use as camps for girls, it is expressly conditioned as a cause for reversion (of this deed) that neither said lands nor any part thereof shall be used for saloon, gambling resort, dance hall, boys or mens camp or auto camp purposes and that no malt, vinous, alcoholic, or intoxicating liquors shall be manufactured or sold on said lands or any part thereof, and that said lands or any part thereof shall not be used for any purpose which might be considered nuisances or detrimental to the use of lands adjacent to said Lake Vera for girls camp purposes.”* This was written in the original Mills College deed and remained the standard for all of the following camp purchases and was repeated in all of the deeds for camps at Lake Vera during that time period.

Between 1931 and 1934 Fisk M. Ray began to sell off all the property around Lake Vera to the various Camp Fire Girls organizations, Sacramento, Oakland, Vallejo, and most importantly, for our purposes, Piedmont Girls Community Services - that property becoming Camp Augusta. The actual survey address is Section 25, Township 17 North, Range 8 East, Mount Diablo Meridian. And there were 3 parcels totaling 79.72 acres. They are presently called Parcel, 10, 24, and 25 on the 2000 Nevada county assessors map.

Meanwhile, in the town of Piedmont, a woman name Rhea Rhupert, known as Rupee, served on the Board of Directors of Piedmont Camp Fire Girls. The Board of Directors of Piedmont Camp Fire Girls and Piedmont Girls Services joined for a time during WWII. Rupee was a teacher in the Piedmont school district and was asked to head up the camp program. Rupee designed it from scratch and in the beginning the girls went to different locations around northern California for their campouts.

For a time they settled in to Camp Meeker which is near Bohemian Grove outside of Occidental California. But, Rupee dreamed of having a place all their own. She had been to Lake Vera and fallen in love with the place. She purchased a parcel (Parcel 23) across Rock Creek from the present day Camp Augusta. (5) The old crib and mortar dam can still be seen on that property just above where “hot rocks” is today. The property is currently owned by Heather Garrison Peck, Rupee’s grandniece.



One day, while standing on the hill above the lake, where the lodge presently stands, Rupee looked down on the lake and dreamed of “being given Lake Vera camp property. Everybody was going to the mountains.” Mills College had been given a site, also Oakland Camp Fire Girls. Why not Piedmont? “For three years this place was constantly on my mind. How to get it?” (5)

She wrote about her campouts with the girls and her dreams and sent them back to the “Piedmonter” which was the name of the Piedmont newspaper at the time. Having read in the newspaper that Billie Bourne, owner of the Empire Mine, had donated a lake (Lake Killarney) to Ireland, she wrote to Mrs. A. Leslie Oliver, another Board member. “I understand you have interests in Grass Valley. How can I meet Billie Bourne?” Mrs. Oliver replied, “Mr. Oliver knows many people up there. Maybe he can help.” (5) Mr. Oliver’s family had made their fortune in explosives, making blasting caps for the mines and the railroads and later during World War II for the war effort. Edwin Letts Oliver, A. Leslie’s brother, was a mining engineer in Grass Valley and became a principle owner in the Idaho Maryland mine until 1955. The family had moved to Piedmont. According to A. Leslie Oliver’s granddaughter, Gina Hind-Hodgson, “in Piedmont everybody knows everybody and most of them graduated from UC Berkeley,” (which might explain the Fisk M. Ray connection.)

A. Leslie Oliver, who was later President of the Piedmont Camp Fire Girls, arranged a meeting with Billie Bourne’s business manager. Mr. Bourne was old and quite ill and nothing came of it. Then Mr. Oliver took Rupee to visit the Ehmann family. He described Mrs. Ehmann as “a woman with a very big heart” who usually gave to the YWCA. The Ehmann’s agreed to finance the purchase of the Camp Augusta property. Mr. Oliver ordered the supplies and construction was completed within three weeks. (5) Rupee’s dream was realized. Rupee remained the Executive Director of Camp Augusta for 17 years from 1930 to 1947.



*Director Rupee and her girls in their Sunday whites  
(Fig. 16)*

It's important to know a little more about the Ehmanns, particularly Freda Ehmann. Her son Edwin, who purchased the Camp Augusta property, came west in the winter of 1891. He secured a position with the firm of Nathan Dohrmann in San Francisco, selling chinaware. He was impressed with the up and coming olive industry and began investing. Then misfortune hit his family back in Illinois. His father died in 1892 and so did his sister. This was a devastating blow to his mother, Freda.

Edwin persuaded her to sell her home in Illinois and move to California with his sister Emma. But the winter of 1894-95 was severe with exceedingly heavy rainfall. To make matters worse, there was a general depression and olive prices fell. Edwin lost his entire investment, including all of his mother's money from the sale of her Illinois home. (6)

At age 56 Freda Ehmann found herself in a new state, her savings gone, her sole tangible asset a 20 acre olive orchard of dubious value. Edwin was urged to file bankruptcy but his mother reminded him

that the family had always paid its debts. She resolved to do what she could to help Edwin regain a sound financial position. In their newly rented home in Oakland, Freda began experimenting with pickling olives. All previous efforts by others had failed. Working long hours from dawn until dusk, and getting advice from the University of California at Davis, Mrs. Ehmann eventually designed the first successful recipe for pickling ripe olives.

She developed a large olive market nationwide and established an olive processing plant in Oroville California, where the Ehmann Olive Factory still stands. She is referred to as the "Mother of the Ripe Olive Industry." Freda died at the age of 93 in Piedmont on November 18, 1932. (6)



*Freda Ehmann, "Mother of the Ripe Olive Industry" (Fig. 17)*

There is a beautiful Craftsman style home in Oroville that was the home of the Ehmanns until 1925. It is presently a museum. There is a wonderful docent at the home named Alberta Tracy who often portrays Freda Ehmann. She hosts teas on Saturdays. Occasionally she will portray Ms. Ehmann's maid, Delia Hart, who came from Ireland in 1920. The whole experience is well worth a visit to Oroville. You can also tour the factory if you arrange the tour in advance through the Butte County Historical Society.



*The Ehmann family home - Oroville, CA (Fig. 18)*



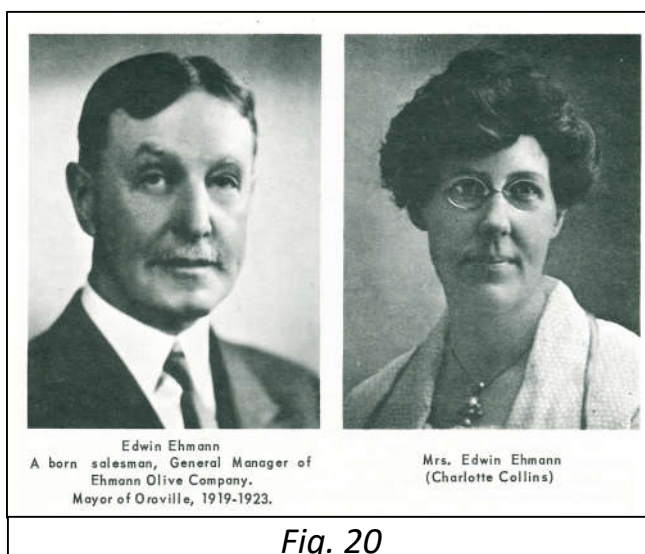


*Plaque dedication ceremony for Edwin and Charlotte Ehmann, 1931 (Fig. 19)*

In the end, the olive industry proved a fortune for Freda and her son Edwin's family. The Ehmanns, now wealthy and prosperous, became philanthropists, giving to many organizations especially dedicated to providing

wholesome opportunities

for the young. We can thank Rupee's vision and the Ehmann's generosity for present day Camp Augusta. There is a picture of a dedication ceremony and a plaque was mounted on a rock near the entrance to the camp, but it has long since disappeared. Edwin married Charlotte Collins, the nice "lady with a big heart." Charlotte's mother's name was Augusta Collins and Camp Augusta is named after her mother. The lodge at Camp Augusta is named after Edwin's mother, Freda Ehmann. (6)



*Fig. 20*



*The lodge today (Fig. 21)*



Language from the deed of F.M. Ray to Edwin William Ehmann is important in terms of property boundaries for Camp Augusta. In a deed dated January 13, 1934 under item 1 it reads *“deed clear title to Piedmont Girls Community Service, Inc. to approximately twenty acres in the westerly portion of the S ½ section 25, T.17 N., R. 8 E. M.B.M. which shall include Rock Creek, Falls, and Gypsy Camp, meets and bounds to be surveyed later to your satisfaction.”* This suggests that Gypsy Falls and Rock Creek were originally on Camp Augusta property. Over time, the boundaries seem to have blurred with adjacent landowners on the east side of Rock Creek probably due to use.

In addition, on that same deed there is an agreement to *“join other property owners at Lake Vera in the formation of a mutual water district and to grant rights of way three feet of either side of present pipe line and tanks...”*

The Lake Vera water district changed over time. In 1957 the Lake Vera Water Company was formed. It consisted of tanks for each camp, the water being pumped from Nevada County Irrigation (NID) ditches (part of the original mining ditches) and was treated with chlorine. NID then extended city potable water to the Lake Vera community and each parcel owner pays for his water, with one exception.

The old de Sabla cabin property, which now belongs to the Ellers, has a contract for water in perpetuity dating back to the sale of the property to Fisk M. Ray. Camp Augusta uses well water. Roland Lazzarotto of Piedmont currently serves on the board of the Lake Vera Water Company as President. (November 2013).

Many stories are told and many photos show what life was like at Camp Augusta during the 30's, 40's and 50's. Gina Hind-Hodgson reports that her mother, Mrs. Virginia Oliver Hind, was a camp counselor and later Executive Director for 6 years during the 1950's. In the early days the campers rode the train from the East Bay to Colfax.



*Reveille brings in the morning at Camp Augusta (Fig. 22)*

Then they transferred to the Narrow Gauge Railroad to Nevada City. From there, they took a bus to camp. The girls wore “greenies” which were green uniforms and better suited to camp life, than the blue and white of traditional Camp Fire Girls. On Sundays they wore white for church services. Everyone began the day with reveille and a flag raising. They closed the evening with taps and a strict curfew. Gina’s mother recruited counselors from her sorority – Kappa Kappa Gamma. The Ehmann girls went to Camp Augusta with Gina.

In talking with Gina Hind-Hodgson, I learned about the Totem Pole that stands near the north entrance to the lodge. All of the images on the pole represent aspects of Camp Augusta. The Eagle at the top is Rupee. The turtle represents turtle rock. The fish represents the swimming sports and all the other images represent some activity at camp. That means the totem pole dates back to the 1930’s – a wonderful representational artifact of early Camp Augusta.



*Nostalgic totem pole at Camp Augusta (Fig. 23)*

## Malaria at Lake Vera?

An unusual incident occurred right after the Korean War in the early 1950's. Nine girls who had spent time at the Camp Fire Girls camps on Lake Vera during the month of July came down with malaria. Their doctors were dumbfounded because malaria had been eradicated in the U.S. following WWII. As it turned out, a young Korean veteran was invited to visit the country by Mr. and Mrs. Nina Muller of Vallejo for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend. They stayed at Rupee's cabin across the creek from Camp Augusta. During that period the young man came down with chills and a fever and thought he had the flu. In fact it was a malaria relapse and during that time he was bitten by an Anopheles variety of mosquito.

This variety can carry the plasmodium vivax parasite that results in malaria. During the 14 – 22 day incubation period the parasite lives in the mosquito's blood. Between July 13 and July 22<sup>nd</sup> the nine girls were bitten. No one suspected the correlation until the State Health department investigated. Once the young man was treated for malaria, it became clear how the disease was transmitted to the campers. Letters were sent out to everyone who attended during that time. The nine families responded and the mystery was solved. There has never been another occurrence of malaria on Lake Vera.



News clipping of malaria case at Camp Augusta  
(Fig. 24)

At one point Camp Fire Boys and Girls and the Piedmont Council of Camp Fire came to a parting of the ways. The national organization pulled the charter (like a franchise) from Piedmont Camp Fire and told them to merge with San Francisco or Oakland. Camp Fire, whose home office is in Kansas City, was forcing mergers across the country and then selling off many of its smaller properties that were deemed excess. A local Piedmont woman attorney intervened, threatening the Piedmont Council with a lawsuit if they turned over the property to Camp Fire. The local Piedmont Council of Camp Fire then recreated itself as a new legal entity called Camp Augusta Inc. and then had no more connection with the Camp Fire program. Camp Fire Boys and Girls then sued Camp Augusta Inc in federal court. The new Piedmont, CA. entity won a summary judgment in court thereby saving Camp Augusta. It was now an independent camp, with its own Articles of Incorporation dated August 17, 1993.

### **Here They Come Again: Hydroelectric Power Revisited**

Almost 100 years after the first dam was built to power the Rome Powerhouse, a member of the Piedmont Camp Fire Council Board of Directors -- who also happened to be a board member for a private company named Northwest Power Company -- tried to build a small hydro project on the South Yuba River during the early 1980s . NPC's plan was to build several small hydroelectric power plants along the South Yuba. Neighbors on Rock Creek were told it would generate income for the Camp Fire Council. At the time, the federal government was giving tax incentives to developers of small hydroelectric projects. NPC's plan was to completely dewater Rock Creek below Lake Vera by diverting water from the natural streambed into a giant overland penstock to transport the water to 120 acres of BLM land near the conjunction of Rock Creek and the South Yuba River, where the hydro plant, turbine, and overhead electrical transmission lines would be built.

Armed with a FERC license (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) Northwest Power Co. requested easements from the neighbors on the north side of Rock Creek to run the penstock over private property. Landowners were threatened with condemnation if they didn't grant the easements. However, when they came to property owned by Susan Levitz, at the confluence of Rock Creek and the Yuba (which today is owned by Michael and Alicia Funk) they were denied access because Levitz was concerned about the environmental impacts on Rock Creek and this pristine section of the South Yuba.



The easement being denied, Northwest Power Company tried to access the Yuba via the south side of Rock Creek. Neighbors were again threatened with condemnation by NPC if they didn't agree to grant easements. Fearing condemnation, most homeowners granted one-year easements for which they were paid virtually nothing by NPC. Soon afterward, in 1985, Levitz bought 80 acres on the south side of Rock Creek from a property owner who had previously granted an easement to NPC. Had the hydro project moved forward, her plan was to slow it down by refusing to renew the easement. In fact, this small hydro project, like all the others proposed on this section of the South Yuba, died a slow death due to purely economic reasons. Over time, most of the federal tax benefits available to small hydro developers were no longer available.

An interesting sidelight is that until the 1960's, the road leading to the Levitz property was called Rome Road. During the revisiting of the possibility of hydroelectric power on Rock Creek, the road's name was changed to New Rome Road – still carrying the nickname of Romulus Colgate of the original powerhouse fame.

### **The Changes and the Legacy**

Many changes have taken place over the years. According to Roland Lazzarotto, a member of the Piedmont Board, "the lodge was rebuilt in 1999. The camp received a grant of about \$200,000 in 1998 and needed to add about \$10,000 or so in additional funds to pay for the work. The roof and log walls were removed. The original fireplace, vertical log posts, roof trusses and framing were saved along with the floor. A couple of old wagon wheel lights were refurbished and reinstalled. All of the exterior doors and windows were replaced with new ones."

They must have done a great job because in 2006 Hallmark used the lodge to make a TV movie. "The Christmas Card," starring Ed Asner, was filmed in what the movie refers to as the "Vet's Hall" where family and community attend a Christmas dance. Believe me, the lodge never looked quite as good as when Hollywood got a hold of it – lace curtains on the glass doors, enormous Christmas tree in the corner, and lots of twinkly lights. Here was yet another use for Camp Augusta, its beauty and its ability to attract creativity.

Many dedicated people helped to establish a wholesome and life changing experience for girls as the place transitioned into a setting for Camp Fire girls. In a brochure from 1954, the introduction states "Camp living offers an ideal setting for a girl to develop self-reliance and independence and for broadening horizons. It has both the



joy of the familiar and old traditions and the thrill of new adventures.” As Gina Hind-Hodgson said, “many happy memories were made at Camp Augusta for thousands of girls.”

### **One Camper’s Experience**

Here is a report by one such happy camper ... “one lesson I have learned at camp: try everything. Through attending and then working at camp I have learned that it is OK to try any and every activity I am interested in, even if I am absolutely terrible at it. Failing miserably can be a little annoying, but how can I ever discover what I love doing if I don’t take risks and explore?

“... my time at camp has reminded me of the importance of family. My biological family is one of the most important influences in my life and it will be very hard to leave them behind. But when I worked at camp last summer I discovered that it is possible to create new families everywhere I go.

“No less importantly, camp has taught me that the easy road is not necessarily the best one to take. Camp has taught me that the things I really want are the ones that take work and dedication to achieve. I probably will never be my perfect self, but I find the fun in running the race, not just finishing it. The process is as rewarding as the end results, and as my mom says, “perfection is highly overrated.” Thanks to Camp Augusta, I have a pretty good sense of what my perfect self looks like, and I now have the tools to go out and become her.”

### **Camp Augusta Today**

The camp now serves boys and families as well as girls. The flag raising and church services have given way to zip lines, extreme sports, yoga, giant silks, goats, chickens, and Battles Royale. But, the thrill of new adventures is ever present, and the sound of joyful campers reverberates through the trees and around the Camp Fire.

While the traditions and adventure haven’t changed, one of the exciting changes has been the counseling staff. They come from all parts of the world, bringing with them their youthful enthusiasm, varying cultures and incredibly delightful accents. It’s an international tour just to visit Camp Augusta these days.

We can see the extraordinary changes that have taken place on Rock Creek, Lake Vera and the land surrounding over the last 150 years. The early placer mining gave way to hydraulic mining, then to hydroelectric power which eventually set the stage for a place for campers and counselors from all over the world. The energy, genius, and dreams that began with the Gold Rush at Rock Creek and established the first hydroelectric power plant in northern California developed Lake Vera and Camp Augusta into the recreational gem it is today.



*Camp Augusta campers and staff members, 2013 (Fig. 25)*



*Summer fun on Lake Vera (Fig. 26)*

The energy, genius, and dreams that began with the Gold Rush at Rock Creek and established the first hydroelectric power plant in northern California, later developed Lake Vera and Camp Augusta into the recreational gem it is today. Camp Augusta is still providing life changing experiences to its campers. In another decade who knows what creative ideas will be providing adventure for the next generation of Camp Augusta children?

But on a quiet moonlit night, if you stand below the lodge and look out over Lake Vera you can hear the echoes of history and sense the presence of all the people that made that property so “magical.” Rupee is standing there with you, giving thanks for all the creative folks who made the dreams happen, and the ultimate dream that became Camp Augusta.

## History of Camp Augusta – Photo References

*The author and Camp Augusta would like to thank the Nevada County Historical Society, the estate of Rhea Rupert, Searls Library, PG&E, and past Camp Augusta staff members and campers for offering copies of their documents and photographs to be used in this publication.*

Above title: Camp Augusta wooden sign (photograph) – Camp Augusta archives

Fig. 1 – Camp Augusta campers enjoying Gypsy Falls (photograph) – Camp Augusta archives

Fig. 2 - Mining on Rock Creek (photograph) – Nevada County archives

Fig. 3 - Nisenan villager (drawing) – <http://thefolios.net/gerould/maidu%20food.jpg>

Fig. 4 – “Lake Vera – Ravine Below Dam” (photograph, pre-dam) – Searl’s Library

Fig. 5 – “Hydraulic mining below Lake Vera dam” (photograph) – Nevada County Historical Society

Fig. 6 – “Founders of the Nevada County Electric Power Company,” Tregidgo and de Sabla (photograph) – Dale Johnson

Fig. 7 – “Early investors in the Nevada County hydraulic power,” Martin and Colgate (photograph) – Dale Johnson

Fig. 8 – “Lake Vera – Ravine Below Dam,” alternate view of Fig. 4 (photograph) – Nevada County Historical Society

Fig. 9 – “Birdseye View of Nevada ‘Rome’ Powerhouse” (scanned image) – Dale Johnson

Fig. 10 – Blowout of Lake Vera Dam (photograph) – Searls Historical Library, Nevada County Historical Society

Fig. 11 – Vera de Sabla, namesake of Lake Vera (scanned newspaper clipping) – Searls Historical Library, Nevada County Historical Society

Fig. 12 – “Lake Vera – West Shore” (photograph) – Searls Historical Library, Nevada County Historical Society

Fig. 13 – Relief map – Lake Vera to Rome Powerhouse (scanned image) – PG&E Archives

Fig. 14 – Ad for Lake Vera Park (scanned image) - Nevada County Historical Society

Fig. 15 – PG&E Valuation of Country Lands (scanned image) – PG&E Archives

Fig. 16 – Rhea Rupert and Camp Fire Girls in their Sunday whites (photograph) - Rupert family archives

Fig. 17 – Freda Ehmann, “Mother of the Ripe Olive Industry” (photograph) – Butte County Brochure

Fig. 18 – Ehmann home in Oroville, CA (photograph) – Marge Kaiser

Fig. 19 – Plaque dedication ceremony, Edwin and Charlotte Ehmann (photograph) – DJ Grubb

Fig. 20 – Edwin and Charlotte Ehmann (scanned image) – Butte County Brochure

Fig. 21 – Lodge sign at Camp Augusta (photograph) – Camp Augusta archives

Fig. 22 – Reveille at Camp Augusta (photograph) – Rupert family archives

Fig. 23 – Camp Augusta totem pole (photograph) – Camp Augusta archives

Fig. 24 – Malaria at Camp Augusta (scanned newspaper clipping) – Rupert family archives

Fig. 25 – Camp Augusta campers and staff members (photograph) – Camp Augusta archives

Fig. 26 – Summer fun on Lake Vera (photograph) – Camp Augusta archives

## History of Camp Augusta References

By Marge Kaiser, M.A. [margekaiser@att.net](mailto:margekaiser@att.net)

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- 2) Lake Vera/Round Mountain Neighborhood Assn. Neighborhood Plan, 1995
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- 5) Rhea Rhupert's Scrapbook: articles written and published in the "Piedmonter" on loan from the Heather Garrison Peck collection, 1930's
- 6) Butte County Historical Society "Diggins;" Freda Ehmann, Vol. 23, No. 3 & 4; Walter E. Bolles and Gertrude N. Bartley; 1979
- 7) Tsi Akim and Chief Kelly Tribe: Much of the information in this section is from spending time with the Maidu and listening to their oral traditions. There is, however, a turn of the century census of the Maidu population that verifies their history.

## Acknowledgements

Many people helped with this project. We are particularly indebted to the following folks who were helpful with emailed information, telephone conversations and personal interviews: Dale Johnson, Gina Hind-Hodgson, Marcie Ellers, Roland Lazarotto, Heather Peck, Steve Cottrell, Nevada City Historian, Alberta Tracy and Jim Lenhoff of Butte County Historical Society, Susan Levitz and Pascale Fusschoeller on New Rome Road, Jim Hurley and Nancy Webber of Lake Vera/Round Mountain Assn, Pat Chestnut, Director of Searls Historical Library, Tom Coleman, Owner, National Hotel and Randall Grayson, Director of Camp Augusta, and the Camp Augusta staff who contributed to the production of this brochure.

### ***About the author***

*Marge Kaiser has been leading Nature Hikes at Camp Augusta for the past 14 years. She lives on New Rome Road in Nevada City and loves Nevada County history. She can be reached at [margekaiser@att.net](mailto:margekaiser@att.net).*

