

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Last Chance Mine

Willey Cruikshank, the son of one of the very early settlers of the coast and mountain section about 70 miles south of Monterey, was a kind man with a great sense of humor. He always walked over the tails. A fortune teller once told him he would be killed by a horse so never rode one. He was a great reader and was fond of poetry.

Willey was the name he liked to be called by and he often said, according to Mabel Plaskett, our informant, "I was named Willey, not William or Billy." However, he was often called Billy by his friends. He did not lack courage and would tackle any job. During the early years of the Buclimo mining operation a young Englishman fell to his death in a deep shaft. None but Willey would go down to recover his body. Taking a piece of canvas he wrapped the remains in it and brought it up the narrow shaft. The Englishman was buried under a nearby pine and word was sent to his family in England of his tragic death.

Mrs. Plaskett recalls that at another time Willey found the body of a Dutchman on the Los Burros trail. Ed Dutton, constable of Jolon, who came to take charge of the body, teased Willey about finding bodies. It was ironical that Willey's own body should lie on the mountains near the trail for six years before being found. In November 1937, Willey started out from New York Mine to spend a few days at the Bane place on the Nacimiento River. He was never heard from again. Search parties combed the area along the Los Burros trail by no trace of Willey.

In 1943 soldiers making a jeep road through the mountains found Willey's remains, his hat and wallet close by. In his wallet was 62 cents. Except for his New York mine he lost the greater part of his money in the bank failure of the Bank of California in San Francisco, where he had his money. His sole remaining relative was a cousin, John Cruikshank, whom he had not seen for years.

"In this year of 1960 as you go by the "Last Chance" (Buclimo) mine, just over the crest of Gold Ridge and about a mile above the Krenkel place, all you see is a quiet swale in the bend of the road, where a corrugated steel shed covers the deep shaft, and tall Coulter pines

whose big cones drop resounding on its roof, a poignant reminder of a day long past." So ends the story as told by Mabel Plaskett.

At Plaskett Creek, near the little school house where children of the pioneers learned to read and write and where their descendants are educated today, one will find a brand new forestry camp ground. There are stoves and tables, camping space or trailer space for 50 groups. This camp ground was filled to capacity over Memorial Day weekend according to the announcement of the Forestry Service.