

Hillsboro Recalls 'Strike' of Gold On Centennial Date

By JACK COATS
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HILLSBORO — Upwards of 3,000 people are expected to attend "Strike Day" festivities Saturday at Hillsboro, marking the 100th anniversary of the day gold was discovered near the present town site, southwest of Truth or Consequences in Sierra County.

The glittering days of the past may be revived again in the future, if the Cullen Oil Co. of Houston has its way.

Cullen Oil Co. owns Quintana Petroleum Corp. of Houston, which in turn owns Quintana Minerals Corp. of Tucson, Ariz. The Tucson firm plans to begin a full-scale open pit copper mining operation later this year.

Actually, gold was first discovered May 23, 1877, by Dave Stitzel and Daniel Dugan. Observance of the anniversary was scheduled May 21 because May 23 falls on a Monday this year, however.

"Strike Day" was celebrated each year after 1877 with music and dancing until 1906. The observance died that year "for no apparent reason," said Ross Bell, president of the Hillsboro Community Center and one of the ramrods for this year's observance.

Credit for the idea of the 100th anniversary celebration goes to Mrs. Lydia Key, owner and curator of the Black Range Museum at Hillsboro, Bell said.

"We needed something to mark this observance," Mrs. Key said. "I certainly wasn't going to let it go by." The affair will be an annual event again, Mrs. Key said.

"Strike Day" will begin with a parade at 10 a.m. More than 50 entries and floats will be in the parade, Bell said, including bands, the El Paso Sheriff's Posse and entrants from Truth or Consequences and elsewhere in the area.

"An old-fashioned barbecue will begin at 11 a.m., with enough food for 1,000," Bell said. "Hillsboro's four restaurants and a catering service from Silver City will provide additional food, with special menus to feed people in a hurry."

"The Rainbow Girls and the Hillsboro 4-H Club also will have concession stands, and we'll have more cold beer than you've ever seen in your life," Bell said with an enthusiastic grin.

A contest for beard-growing and a traditional old fiddler's contest are scheduled at 2 p.m., and a dance is scheduled at 9 p.m.

Another of the highlights will be a drawing for one ounce of gold, worth an estimated \$150, which was panned from a creek near here recently by one of the

pioneer miners, Raymond "Shorty" Campbell, Bell said.

"A Strike Day queen will be crowned, and prizes will be awarded for best float, best beard and costume and for the top three fiddlers," Bell said.

Hillsboro has been continuously occupied since the days of the first strike. A listing of Hillsboro on some maps as a "ghost town," is erroneous, pioneer residents are quick to point out.

Present population is estimated at about 150 families. "We have 56 children riding the school bus each day," Bell said.

Others assisting with the anniversary plans are Postmaster Leroy Sullivan, Mrs. Sue Bason and Mrs. Cora Manning. "But that's not all," Bell said. "Everybody's pitching in to help."

The original strike first discovered by Stitzel and Dugan assayed at \$160 a ton. Joined a day after the first strike by Joe Yankie, the three staked out claims which later became known as the Opportunity and Ready Pay Mines.

Other early-day miners, Nicholas Galles, W.P. Weeks and H.H. Elliott joined the mining camp a short time later.

Mines could soon be found in any direction from Hillsboro, with the Opportunity, Ready Pay, Bonanza, Snake and Wick's to the north, silver mines to the south near Lake Valley, silver mines to the west near Kingston, and still other mines to the east in the Caballo Mountains.

Historical accounts state that Hillsboro had four saloons, four grocery stores and four companies of soldiers by 1880. The U.S. Army was needed to protect the miners from Indian raids by Geronimo and Victorio, and bandits.

Jesse James, members of the Dalton Gang, Butch Cassidy and other infamous gunmen also frequented Hillsboro.

Beautiful women, heady perfume and satin sheets soon found their way into the Hillsboro mining area, which by that time was producing an estimated \$100 million in gold and silver.

Lottie Deno, the "prettiest monte dealer in the west," and her boyfriend, Cherokee Hall, established a gambling hall and saloon to help the miners part with their riches.

Sadie Orchard, or "Madame Sadie," as she was affectionately known, fresh from the brothels of London's Limehouse District, moved to Hillsboro in 1886 with a stable of young ladies from England and New York's Bowery.

"Sadie was a lady," an early-day ac-



Journal Photo by Jack Coats

Mrs. Cora Manning, Owner of Antique Shop Stripping Varnish From An Old Mirror

count says. She operated her own brothel and hostelry, the Ocean Grove Hotel, and a restaurant with the best food "anywhere."

Except, perhaps at "The Chinaman's Place," just down the street from Sadie's.

Tom Yang, fresh from San Francisco, Calif., came to Hillsboro to go to work for Sadie. But Sadie and Tom couldn't get along, historical accounts say, so Tom Yang opened up his own restaurant and named it "The Chinaman's Place."

Tom finally closed his restaurant when the Sierra County seat was moved from Hillsboro to Hot Springs (now Truth or Consequences) in 1933.

"Madame Sadie" also operated a stage-coach line which carried the riches to the railroad stop at McNutt. On a bet, she duplicated Lady Godiva's famous ride by racing a horse down the main street of Hillsboro, wearing only her long, black hair.

During the flu epidemic of 1918, Sadie and her girls cooked and cared for the sick and the orphans, and took over the support of one family when the father was sent to prison.

Sadie's restaurant and hotel became the focal point for business and activity in Hillsboro, and was visited by many well-known leaders of that era. When Sadie died in 1941, she was remembered by hundreds.

The flood of 1914 almost wiped out

Hillsboro, but the community refused to become a ghost town.

Some families moved away, but others moved in, including Sir Victor Sasoon, a member of a world-known British banking firm, who purchased a two-story home near the Catholic church.

Artists, craftsmen and others, including businessmen, ranchers and professional rodeo riders, have since moved to Hillsboro, adding color to the community.

The Hillsboro Community Center, which occupies the old high school building, provides facilities for tennis, dances, pot luck dinners and private parties. A youth center and swimming pool also are provided.

The Rio Perchas River flooded Hillsboro again on a Saturday night of the Labor Day weekend in early September 1972, reminding old timers of the 1914 flash flood. Three persons lost their lives in the 1972 flood.

The residents of Hillsboro built the town back again, however, displaying the same pioneer spirit for which the community has always been noted.

Three other festivals are held at Hillsboro each year.

Street sales and dances are always conducted on the Memorial Day weekend, and on the weekend nearest July 4.

The Apple Festival is conducted on Labor Day weekend, and attracts hundreds of people.