

# HISTORIC MARIPOSA COUNTY

**Mariposa** took its name from Mariposa Creek, which was so named by Spanish explorers in 1806, when they discovered great clusters of butterflies ("mariposas" in Spanish) in the foothills of the Sierras. It is an unincorporated community that serves as the county seat of Mariposa County, California. Mariposa County is known as the "Mother of California Counties." While the first Legislature was awaiting Statehood in the year of 1850, it met and created the structure of the new state. It made Mariposa the largest county, covering one-fifth of the state. Why they chose to create such a large county is not clear. One can assume that since the area south of Mariposa was largely considered waste land, that any interest at that time in an area seemingly devoid of promise and gold could be held as a large tract whose value could be determined later. From that large portion of middle California, all or part of 11 counties were eventually created.

CATHEY'S VALLEY NEWS  
Fresno Bee Republican, December 13, 1963

## POSTOFFICE NAME AGAIN WILL BE

**CATHEY'S VALLEY**—Cathey's Valley again will be the official name for this postoffice in Mariposa County, nestling in the lower foothills, effective January 1st. The change in name from Cathay to Cathey's Valley followed a petition to the US Postal Department by nearly 100 per cent of the residents in that area. Cathey's Valley is named for the Cathey family who originally settled in this agricultural area and filled the bread basket for the miners during the Gold Rush. They particularly provided grain and meat for the entire area. Said one Cathey descendent: "The women were almost too religious, and the men loved to gamble and race horses." The Cathey's Valley Methodist Church was started by this family, and the Mariposa Methodist Church was supported by the Cathey's Valley Church for many years. Descendent of the original Cathey, Wills, and Rowland families still live in this picturesque valley and recall the stories handed down of the wagon train days across the plains and mountains. Gloria Palmer, postmistress of Cathey's Valley, announced the zip code number of 95306 will remain the same after the name change.

Daily Evening Bulletin, (SF, CA) April 24, 1858

**A CHINESE TOWN PROJECTED-** The Mariposa Gazette says that it is the intention of the Chinese population in its county to build a permanent town near the garden of Allison & Powell, about two miles from the town of Mariposa. Lots have been already staked off, and other preparations made for found a Celestial city, where they can sit under their own canvass, and smoke opium to their heart's content, without being interfered with by "outside barbarians." Judging from the crowd already in and near Mariposa town, and the numbers daily arriving, it may become a place of note. It is estimated that the Orientals already in the county, outnumber the white population about two to one.

New Catholic Church Stockton Daily Independent FRIDAY, 23 JAN 1863

**MARIPOSA NEWS** -- During the last year, says the 'Gazette,' many improvements have been made in Mariposa -- many of them being of special importance, as indicating the growth and prosperity of that place; but there has been erected no structure deserving so much credit, or adding so much to the beauty of the place as the new Catholic church. The enterprising citizens who have labored and worked and accomplished this are deserving of all credit. It exhibits an energy -- a religious devotion -- truly admirable and worthy the commendation of all good people. The new church has been erected between 1st and 2nd streets, fronting on Main street, on a little eminence, and its steeple rises high over the town. 2 blocks will embrace the entire grounds; the one on Main street containing the church and grounds, and the block in the rear -- 250 feet by 125 -- being intended for a cemetery. The selection of the site is well made; and it is capable of being rendered even more beautiful than at present. The church is not entirely finished, but near enough to have been consecrated, in accordance with the rites of the Catholic persuasion, on Sunday last.



St. Josephs - C Johnson

Fresno Bee, August 11, 1925

**Mariposa**-(Mariposa County) Aug. 11- After seventy-one years the old Mariposa County Courthouse has been fitted with water pipes. No more will court be recessed while judge and jury descend stairs and cross the street to quench a Midsummer thirst. Incidentally the improvements afford the first fire protection to the building since its erection in 1854, and progressive residents are in hopes that shrubbery and lawns will soon adorn the spacious courthouse grounds.



*Compliments of the Mariposa County Arts Council*

**MORMON BAR** - Mormon Bar was first mined in 1849 by members of the Mormon Battalion. They, however, stayed only a short time and their places were taken at once by other miners. Later, thousands of Chinese worked the same ground over again.

**Location:** On small auxiliary rd on right, 500 ft SE of intersection of State Hwy 49 and Ben Hur Rd, 1.8 mi S of Mariposa

**BEAR VALLEY** - First called Johnsonville, Bear Valley had a population of 3,000, including Chinese, Cornish, and Mexicans. During 1850-60 when Col. John C. Frémont's Ride Tree and Josephine Mines were producing, Frémont's elegant hotel, Oso House, was built with lumber brought around the Horn. It no longer stands. After a fire in 1888, structures were rebuilt. Some still standing are Bon Ton Saloon, Trabucco Store, Odd Fellows Hall, school house and remains of jail. **Location:** On State Hwy 49, Bear Valley

**COULTERVILLE** - George W. Coulter started a tent store here in early 1850 to supply the hundreds of miners working the rich placers of Maxwell, Boneyard, and Black Creeks. He also built the first hotel, water for it was pumped from a well by two Newfoundland dogs. Originally called Banderita from the flag flying over Coulter's store, the settlement became Maxwell Creek when the post office was established in 1853, but the name was changed the following year to honor Coulter. The family of Francisco Bruschi, who erected the first permanent building here, provided the town's leading merchants for over eighty years. Despite their crude methods, and with only wood for fuel, the nearby quartz mines operated for years and produced millions of dollars worth of gold, Andrew Goss built the first stamp mill for crushing their ore. **Location:** County Park, NE corner of intersection of County Hwy J20 and State Hwy 132, Coulterville

**HORNITOS** - Hornitos, 'little ovens,' derived its name from the presence of many old Mexican stone graves or tombs built in the shape of little square bake ovens and set on top of the ground. The town seemed to have been settled by an undesirable element driven out of the adjoining town of Quartzburg, but as the placers at Quartzburg gave out, many of its other citizens came to Hornitos. It became the first and the only incorporated town in Mariposa County.

**Location:** 11 mi W of Bear Valley on County Road J16, Hornitos

**AGUA FRIA** - One-quarter mile north of Carson Creek, a tributary of Agua Fria Creek, was located the town of Agua Fria, in 1850-51 the first county seat of Mariposa County. One of the original 27 counties in California, Mariposa County comprised one-sixth of the state-all of what is now Merced, Madera, Fresno, Tulare, Kings, and Kern Counties-until 1852, while mining was the main industry of region. The town of Mariposa became the seat of government in 1852, and the courthouse there was completed in 1854.

**Location:** 4189 State Hwy 140, 3.2 mi W of Mariposa

**SAVAGE TRADING POST** - Here, in 1849, James D. Savage established a store built of logs. He engaged in trading and mining. In spring of 1850, fearing Indian depredations, he moved to Mariposa Creek, in December his store and others were pillaged and burned. A volunteer battalion was formed and Savage, elected mayor, went in pursuit of the tribe. Their secret hideout in Yosemite Valley was discovered and the war brought to a quick end. Major Savage was killed by a political opponent in August 1852.

**Location:** On State Hwy 140, 8 mi W of El Portal

**MARIPOSA COUNTY COURTHOUSE** - This mortise-and-tenon Greek Revival courthouse, erected in 1854, is California's oldest court of law and has served continuously as the seat of county government since 1854. During the 19th century, landmark mining cases setting legal precedent were tried here, and much United States mining law is based on decisions emanating from this historic courthouse. **Location:** 10th and Bullion Sts, Mariposa



**Mariposa County Jail** - This stone edifice is the second jail to have served Mariposa County since the early 1850's. The first jail was constructed in 1852 of logs cut from an area known as "Logtown," located behind the present public and fraternal cemeteries. Located near the creek behind the Trabucco Warehouse, the first jail was burned in the fire of 1858 which consumed most of the south end of town. Its replacement was built that same year, at a cost to the county of \$14,770. **Location:** Bullion at 4th Steet

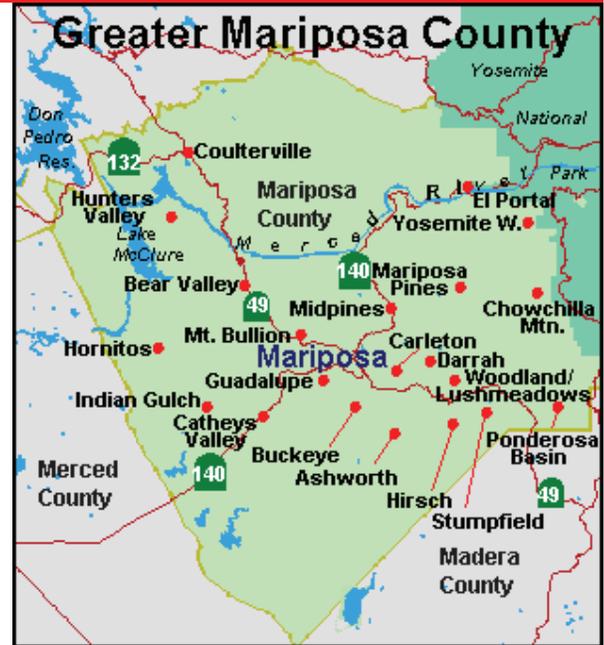
# MARIPOSA COUNTY NOW

## Mariposa County

Mariposa County is home to a good portion of Yosemite National Park. Nestled in the western foothills of the Sierra Nevada, historic Mariposa is laid out on a grid made up of one main street and a dozen side streets. Mariposa is located at 2,000 feet in elevation. A good deal of the local economy is related to Yosemite and tourism. At the 2000 census Mariposa population was 17,130. The county has a total area of 1,463 square miles of which 1,451 square miles of it is land and 12 square miles of it is water. The primarily white population has 11.8 people per square mile who are separated by sprawling cattle ranches and towering mountains. Many of the largest group of Native Americans, the Southern Miwok, still live in the region. They lived in Northern California on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada mountains. Their history and lifestyle are on display in Yosemite.

The area is ideally suited for those interested in outdoor activities and rural community life. Mariposa County offers a wide variety of recreational opportunities from hiking and camping, to boating at Lake McClure and Lake Don Pedro; fishing in the Merced River for the big Rainbows as well as in many other streams and lakes; picnicking with the family to horseback riding, gold panning and on and on.

**Plants and Animals** Groves of Giant Sequoias occur along a narrow band of altitude on the western side of the Sierra Nevada. Giant Sequoias are the most massive trees in the world. Regional species: Ponderosa pine and Jeffrey pine, California Black Oak, Incense-Cedar, Giant Sequoia, Lodgepole Pine, Red Fir, Mountain Hemlock, Sierra Juniper, with Mountain Chickadee, Dark-eyed Junco, Western Gray Squirrel, Mule Deer, American Black Bear, Sage Grouse, Great Grey Owl, Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel, Marten, Hermit Thrush, Steller's Jay, Red Tailed Hawk, coyote, White-headed Woodpecker, and naturally—Monarch Butterfly.



### Transportation

The Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) serves Mariposa County and Yosemite: 1-877-989-2787. Hwy 140 is a designated AMTRAK Route to Yosemite with rail service 35 miles away, in Merced. Mariposa County Transit operates two systems: Dial-A-Ride and the Senior and VA system structured to the special needs of seniors and veterans. Both systems run Monday through Friday. For information call 966-5315 or 966-RIDE.

### John C. Fremont Hospital

(209) 966-3631

Mariposa County is fortunate to have John C. Fremont Hospital and Clinic has the only 24-hour Emergency Room in Mariposa and Eastern Madera Counties. Medical Clinic, Acute Care, Long Term Care, Outpatient Surgery, Home Health/Hospice, Private Duty

*Compliments of the Mariposa County Arts Council*

**Mariposa Museum and History Center**[www.mariposamuseum.com](http://www.mariposamuseum.com)

(209) 966-2924

The Mariposa Museum and History Center is considered to be one of the best small museums in America by the Smithsonian Institute. Displayed are artifacts of the Gold Rush Era, a working stamp mill, examples of carriages, wagons, and a Native American area. On the grounds are the Counts House, once owned by a county official, the building that once housed the Mariposa Gazette, California's oldest weekly newspaper of continuous publication. Inside is a full-sized replica of a mining town with authentic artifacts.

**California State Mining and Mineral Museum**

(209) 742-ROCK (7625)

The California State Mining and Mineral Museum is located at the Mariposa Fairgrounds, two miles south of Mariposa on Highway 49 S. The state collection of minerals, mining machinery and artifacts was moved to Mariposa from the Ferry Building in San Francisco. The Gold exhibit is without peer, featuring the Fricot nugget, an approximately 13-pound specimen of crystalline gold.

**Northern Mariposa County History Center**[www.museumsusa.org/museums/info](http://www.museumsusa.org/museums/info)

209-878-3015

The Northern Mariposa County History Center in Coulterville is housed in the remains of the three-story Coulter Hotel. Destroyed in the 1899 fire, the ingenious citizens of Coulterville rebuilt the upper-story rooms for the collection and kept the balance of the building for a garden. Included in the museum interior is the former drug store, where the fixtures are still in place, and many artifacts of a mining town. Downtown Coulterville, contained in one of the two historic districts in Mariposa County, is anchored by the three-story Hotel Jeffery, fully restored and available on a daily basis.

**Mariposa County Library**  
4978 10th Street in Mariposa<http://www.mariposalibrary.org/>

209-966-2140

**Mariposa County Amphitheatre**

Parks &amp; Recreation

209-9662498

4998 County Park Road: 6th Street R-Stroming Road, L-County Park Road

**Mariposa County Art Park** Hwy 140 at 4th Street ,  
parking 5th Street- Popular Mariposa County Arts  
Council free summer music series each  
Friday and Saturday evening