

The true history of the first discovery of gold  
in California in 1842.

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F. Lopez de Belderrain

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F. Lopez de Belderrain





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From Francisca López de Belderrain

July 12, 1930



THE TRUE HISTORY OF THE  
FIRST DISCOVERY OF GOLD  
IN CALIFORNIA IN 1842

and

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

of

FRANCISCO LOPEZ

The Discoverer.

By Francisca Lopez de Belderrain

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## MY DREAM REALIZED

For twelve long years my dream to see my kinsman, Francisco Lopez, the discoverer of the first gold in California, given due honor, remained unrealized. This great historical event has been consistently ignored by nearly all of the historians of the present day, notwithstanding their ravenous delving for new material. This most important event seemed to have escaped their notice in their craving for plebeian themes, which many times placed the wonderful argonauts of those early colorful days in California in ridiculous or disparaging situations, either through prejudice or ignorance of the truth.

Therefore, this historical event remained for so long covered with dust of neglect, and James W. Marshall received the honors due Francisco Lopez.

Six years ago, in a conversation with Mr. A. G. Rivera, Chief of the County's Corps of Interpreters and a very active member of Ramona Parlor, No. 109, Native Sons of the Golden West, I told him of this dire neglect, and about my ambition to see a monument erected some day upon the exact spot where gold was first discovered, to commemorate this important happening, but that I seemed helpless to accomplish my desire.

Mr. Rivera became greatly interested, and urged me to find the owner of the land, where the precious metal first came to light, and endeavor to secure the consent of the owner, either to sell or to donate a parcel of ground at the proper site, and assured me that the Native Sons of the Golden West, one of whose principal aims is to mark historical landmarks, would carry my plans to completion.

So, very hopefully, I began my investigations. Little did I



dream how handicapped I should be by persons not historically minded.

My first big undertaking, of course, was to ascertain the name of the owner of the land in the Placerito Canyon, the site of the discovery. I corresponded with various persons in Newhall, being told that the land most likely belonged to the H. M. Newhall company of San Francisco, but no address was given. A year or more fled by, and still no clue, but my ardour was not subdued. One day, in reading my daily newspaper, I chanced to see an article mentioning the name of the Southern California Manager of the Newhall Company. He gave me the San Francisco address. I wrote inquiring if the company owned the Placerito property. In due time I received a very courteous letter, explaining certain facts, and enclosed was the address of a prominent elderly gentleman, owner of the land adjoining the Placerito, who could give me the desired information. I called this man over the telephone repeatedly, but could not get in touch with him. Several months went by before I could speak with him. But each time I asked if he owned the land called Placerito, or if he knew who owned it, the only answer accorded me was "NO!"-- Months afterwards, summoning courage to call, the same harsh "NO!" greeted me and the sharp click of the receiver as he hung up the phone.

"Alas", I grieved, "this ends my investigation", and indeed, I felt greatly discouraged, and lamented being hampered for so many years by such cruel circumstances. But finally I succeeded in interesting some parties in my search and went with them to the Placerito to point out the enchanted spot.

On one of these visits, I met Mr. F. E. Walker, and asked him if he owned the land. When he answered in the affirmative, I was overjoyed. Then I told him the romantic story of the gold discovery and inquired whether he could consider selling or donating to posterity enough ground



(3-My Dream)

for the erection of a monument, a memorial to Francisco Lopez.

Without hesitation he replied that he would gladly donate the required ground for that purpose, and Mrs. Walker augmented her husband's promise by stating that they would donate enough to plat a small park.

Immediately, with my heart thrilled with joy and pride, I communicated with Mr. Rivera, who was delighted with my long-deferred success in acquiring the land. I turned over the entire matter to Mr. Rivera, holding myself ready to be of any assistance possible at any time. At the following meeting of Ramona Parlor, he placed the project before the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West. Then the Kiwanis Club, The Newhall-Saugus Chamber of Commerce, and La Mesa Club of Los Angeles also imbibed the enthusiasm of Mr. Rivera and myself, and joined in making the memorable occasion of the anniversary, March 9, 1930, an historic and outstanding event.

The organization is working hard to make the monument a fitting and noble memorial to Francisco Lopez.

At last my dream of years has been realized!



THE HISTORY OF THE FIRST  
DISCOVERY OF GOLD IN CALIFORNIA, in the

Year 1842

An unique celebration took place on March 9th of this year of our Lord, 1930, by members of the Ramona Parlor of the Native Sons of the Golden West, the Kiwanis Club, the Newhall-Saugus Chamber of Commerce, the La Mesa Club of Los Angeles, also many friends, to commemorate the 88th historic anniversary of the discovery of gold in California.

A temporary tablet was placed over a mound of boulders which had lain hidden for many years, under a thick coppice, until Mr. F. E. Walker, owner of the land, who with his wife, had said that they would gladly donate enough land for the monument and also for a little park, offered to do the clearing of the place where the Native Sons of the Ramona Parlor were to build a temporary monument of granite rocks, for which the Lopez family were to donate part of the boulders. As he reached the wall of the side of the hill, the original monument came to view. Mr. Walker immediately notified Mr. Adolfo G. Rivera, chief of the County's Corps of Interpreters, a native son, and sponsor for the celebrations program. Mr. Rivera was overjoyed in finding the original monument and decided to put the tablet on it.

The true history of the first discovery of gold in California was written by Dona Francisca Lopez de Belderrain, and the paper was read by Miss Isabel Claire Lopez, also kin to the discoverer.

This history runs as follows:

The first discovery of gold in California took place in the month of March, 1842, in one of the canyons of the San Francisquito Rancho, later called Placerito Canon, about forty miles northwest of the City of Los Angeles. This ranch first belonged to the Mission of San Fernando, which was founded in 1797, and became a basic center of operations where numerous industries were taught neophytes under the supervision of Spanish teachers.



After secularization of the missions by the Mexican government, Dona Jacoba Feliz y Lopez de del Valle, applied to the Government for San Francisquito, as a grant for herself and husband, Don Antonio del Valle. The ranch was granted to them. After Don Antonio's demise, the ranch was divided between his widow and children. The former came to Los Angeles to live, her home being near to the Old Plaza Church, where she married don Jose Salazar. After her marriage, she returned with her husband to the ranch to live. This land was later sold to Mr. Newhall and it was in one of its canyons that gold was first discovered in California. The original discoverer of gold in California was don Francisco Lopez, second son of Don Juan Lopez and Dona Dolores Salgado, who was a teacher and a member of the School Board of Los Angeles, in the "Forties". The public has known Don Francisco as only a vaquero or cow-boy, a nephyte of San Fernando Mission.

This is erroneous and it is only fair to him, that a glimpse be given into his true status and character. The part he played in the development in the Great West should be recognized and his memory perpetuated.

Don Juan was a descendant of an early Spanish California family. He had two sons, Pedro and Francisco, and two daughters, Ramona and Maria de Jesus. Don Pedro was, for many years, mayordomo (general manager) of the material affairs pertaining to the Mission of San Fernando at the time when the Mexican Government took possession of the Mission and Don Antonio del Valle was its administrator. Don Pedro fulfilled his duties with efficiency. Don Francisco's tastes were unlike those of his brother's, as he devoted his time to literature and history and was very fond of big game hunting in the mountains. He also took great pleasure in prospecting for gold, as he had taken a course of mining at the famous "Colegio de Mineria" (Mining College in the City of Mexico). (Gold Days of California by Dr. Owen-Coy, page 10). In this way he spent his vacations. With his wife he would often spend a week or two at the Rancho of his niece, Dona Jacoba F. L. de Salazar. In fact, he rented a section of the San Francisquito Ranch for his own stock. Often



attired in a leather hunting suit, he would mount his horse, lay his rifle across the pommel of his saddle, and with his hunting knife fastened to his belt, would start for the mountains to take a look at his stock and interview his vaqueros. He was always accompanied by a trusted servant carrying his mochila (saddle-bags) containing prospectors tools. Each time he spied a cropping of rock having the appearance of mineral, he would dismount and break off bits of the rock, examine them attentively, then fill his mochila with the pieces to take home for a more thorough examination; but invariably his prospecting met with disappointment.

Don Francisco was a well educated man of high ideals. He received his education in the City of Mexico, where he studied French, as his paternal ancestors were proficient in that language. He was reserved and ceremonious. His appearance and manners were those of a caballero or gentleman of that period.

One fine morning in the Spring of 1842, when making one of his periodical visits to his niece's ranch, Don Francisco made preparations for an all-day outing in the mountains. Garbed in his hunting attire, Don Francisco stood ready to start on his trip on that eventful day, which would immortalize his name. He wore a wide brimmed hat, a silk handkerchief around his neck and gauntlet gloves; chaparreras made out of bear skin; a pistol and hunting knife in their scabbards on a strong leather belt. His horse was a fine sorrel. The saddle was of brown leather, with big tapaderas covering the stirrups; a Mexican bridle, a rope made of horse hair of different colours, wound around the horse's neck, a rifle across the pommel of the saddle and a canteen with water hanging from the bow of the saddle. It was the lenten season and the country was luxuriant with verdure. As he was bidding good-bye to his wife, she asked him to bring her some wild onions which grew in abundance in the canyons. After inspecting the stock, and taking a hard stroll up and down the mountains, he felt rather fatigued, and, as the hour of noon had arrived, he selected a shady tree under which to rest and have lunch. Recently the tree has been acclaimed the oldest in Southern California. It is an oak, said to be five hundred years old. He alighted from his horse, and his servant spread a zarape or Mexican



blanket on the ground, unsaddled his master's horse and placed the saddle on one end of the zarape, that it might serve as a head rest. The boy then, made the coffee and served the lunch. After a lengthy siesta, don Francisco awoke and suddenly remembered his wife's request. Taking the knife from his belt, he went to the slope near by and began to dig up some of the wild onions. Noticing some yellow particles clinging to the roots, he examined them wonderingly. He shook the earth from the roots, set them down and started to dig again with vigour. Upon examining the earth closely, he suddenly started to his feet and shouted, "Gold! I have found it at last! Gold! Gold!"

He continued digging and found more and more. The boy awakened thoroughly frightened by the shouting, thinking his master had gone mad. He was calmed with difficulty and made to help dig. Don Francisco then filled his mochila with the precious earth and rushed back to the Rancho with the glad news, where his wife and niece with the rest of the household joined him in rejoicing at the good fortune he had at last attained in his ambition after many years of fruitless prospecting.

At that time all the women rode horse back on side saddles and next morning everybody rode to the mission at San Fernando, to impart the great news to Pedro, the brother of Francisco. There was a happy family reunion at the Mission that evening. When supper was over, the Rosary was said and hymns sung. Afterwards a set or two of quadrilles were danced. At sunrise, the next morning, Don Francisco started for Los Angeles in company with his brother and some friends with servants, following to notify the governmental authorities of his discovery. The "Poblanos" (Town people) were greatly excited over the news. Soon an imissary was despatched to the City of Mexico with the joyful report. When Governor Alvarado was informed of the gold discovery, he bestowed an expediente, or official title on Don Francisco in recognition of the merits of his find, and at the same time he appointed Don Ignacio del Valle Encargado de Justicia (The Record of this is found in the Historical Society of Southern California's Records, Vol. 8, Commissioner of Justice.).



"Again and again," says Mr. Charles Prudhomme, an authority on early California History, "we read that to James W. Marshall belongs the credit of first having discovered gold in California."

"They say that often a falsehood well stuck to, or asserted with confidence and boldness, is as good as the truth." The aphorism seems well supported, for while that has been believed and stated by many, the writer of this is prepared to show with an affidavit that it is a grievous error. Also an error in history, which assigns the honor and credit due one man, to another who can not justly claim it. We will proceed to set forth in detail and give ample proof that James W. Marshall was not the original discoverer of gold in California, nor was Sutter's Mill the locality. On the contrary, the discovery was first made by Don Francisco Lopez and in Southern California, several years prior to the alleged discovery by Mr. Marshall; in fact in 1842 and at the locality known as Placerito Canyon. Don Francisco' second discovery was made in the following year, 1843, at a place known as San Feliciano. We are also prepared to show that another person, don Mariano Lopez, made the third discovery of gold at the College Farm, near Santa Ines Mission in Santa Barbara County, in 1843.

"Don Francisco Lopez, as the true, first and pioneer discoverer of gold in California in the year 1842 has, up to the present time, not been publicly accorded the recognition that is his due. This may have arisen from various causes. It may possibly be accounted for, in part, because of his nationality, for at that early date, so soon after the Mexican War and the United States coming in, there was naturally some prejudice against the Spanish population, and no particular desire on the part of writers, to give them prominence. This is a rushing world. Thus it often happens that a man or his reputation is the victim of circumstances. For this reason, we present copies of the affidavit of the "First Gold discovery in California, in 1842.

"The following transcript records were once owned by Cyrus Lyons, whom in his youth came to the Pueblo de Los Angeles, in 1849; by his daily report we



find, as follows, that in 1842, about forty-five miles North-West from the Pueblo de Los Angeles, were discovered the Placerito or placer mines by Francisco Lopez, and that in the same year, he discovered the San Feliciano Placer Mines."

"In 1843 Francisco Garcia was piloted to, and shown by Francisco Lopez, his two discoveries in order that he might see the number of miners needed for the works. Senor Garcia returned to Sonora, Mexico, and in the course of six months, came back with thirty Mexican gambusinos or placer miners. These miners were divided. Some went to Placerito and some to San Feliciano. From the former place, they took 212 pounds of gold avoirdupois. It was weighed by David W. Alexander, who, in the year 1855 made an affidavit to this effect."

"Jose Salazar, who came from Sonora, Mexico, went to the San Feliciano Mines in the later part of 1843 and from a place he was working took out forty-two thousand dollars worth of nuggets."

"In 1854 Don Francisco Lopez took me, Cyrus Lyons and my brother, Sanford, to an oil spring from which the Padres of San Fernando Mission carried the oil in raw-hide bags to the Mission, where it was distilled for lighting purposes. We also visited the gold fields heretofore referred to, and obtained from him all the information and history of the discovery of the gold mines in the possession of Don Francisco Lopez."

"During the years of 1850 to 1858, there were not less than 6000 people mining for gold in the Placerito and San Feliciano Mines."

"In the year 1858, I, Cyrus Lyons, purchased from Jose Espinosa, one nugget he found, from which I realized Dls. 1928.00.—This was the largest piece known to have been taken from this locality."

Mr. Prudhomme continues: "Concerning the gold discovery, we will remark that for the most part, the present generation really does not understand the true history of the gold discovery in California. James W. Marshall has been honored as the ideal pioneer in this discovery. However, for the sake of history and those



whom it may concern, I will point out this fact: Let Mr. Marshall have the credit due him for having been the first person to discover gold at Sutter's Fort in the year 1848, but let all who will, investigate and freely acknowledge, irrespective of racial preference, that the real pioneer and first discoverer of gold in California was not James W. Marshall, but don Francisco Lopez, at Placerito Canyon in 1842."

"Lastly we will add: Let the truth of history be known, let justice be done, though the Heavens fall. Let James W. Marshall yield up the laurels of fame as the first discoverer of gold in California to the brow of Don Francisco Lopez, to whom they justly belong."

Doña Francisca adds that nearly all the old historians in the State of California, mention the first gold discovery in the State, which took place in March, 1842. The historical Society of Southern California, vol. 8, Page 228, copies part of J. M. Quinn's account of it,--which says that the first parcel of California gold dust that was ever coined in the United States mint in Philadelphia, was taken from the products of the mines of the Placerito, and was carried in a vessel around the Cape Horn. It consisted of 18.34 ounces and was deposited in the mint July 8, 1843, by Alfred Robinson. Its value, after coining was \$344.75, over \$19.00 an ounce. It was sent by Don Abel - Stearns.

Mr. William Heath Davies, in his "Sixty Years in California," places the amount at \$80,000.00 to \$100,000.00 for the first two years after the discovery. The editor of the "Star" of San Francisco, in the issue of December 3, 1869, says: "In the spring of 1862, Wells, Fargo and Company were shipping to San Francisco \$12,000 worth of gold dust per month by steamer, and probably as much, or more was sent by other shippers or taken by private parties; all this the product of San Fernando, San Gabriel and Santa Anita. Add to this estimate the amount taken out of San Fernando placers from 1842 to 1847 and all the other mines, except at the San Gabriel, from 1855 down to the present time, and the yield of the Los Angeles placer mines would reach, if not exceed, five million dollars."



Mofras, the French historian, says in Vol I, page 489: "The only mine active in the country today is at this time in the ledge of virgin gold near the mission of San Fernando, which a Frenchman by the name of M. Baric exploits and which yields almost an ounce of pure gold a day."

In the Spring of 1843 Don Francisco wished to commemorate the anniversary of the great historical event with a solemn high mass. A provisional chapel was therefore built on the very spot where the gold was first found. Ovens and enramadas or arbours were built and everything was made ready for the celebration. Several carretas were sent to the place the day before with the food supplies. The walls of the chapel were hung inside with richly embroidered shawls and the floor was covered with bear skins and those of other wild animals. The altar was built on the side of the hill, which had been leveled for the purpose. Three priests, two from San Fernando Mission and one from Los Angeles, celebrated Mass. Six altar boys and the whole choir from the Mission, eight musicians and ten singers, all neophytes, took part.

Many prominent families of Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, as well as from the surrounding country, were present, including the men commissioned by the Mexican government to investigate the aforesaid discovery. Many games, typical of the period, were played, and a barbecue was served under the big oak tree where Don Francisco had napped. It was a gala day. Officers in their uniforms and women in their brocades and richly embroidered shawls formed a picturesque scene.

In the autumn of 1914, the late Doña Catalina Lopez de Lopez, niece of the gold discoverer, and the wife of Don Jeronimo Lopez, invited all her children, grand-children, their children, her nieces and near relatives to a picnic near the spot where the mass celebrating of the gold discovery had been held.

Doña Francisca was present at this historical picnic, which was given in her honor by her aunt Doña Catalina, with the object of acquainting the family with the location; as she knew how deeply interested her niece was in history; especially in this particular historical event. When the repast was over, Doña



Catalina led the way to the place where the chapel was built.

Dona Catalina, who was well known for her philanthropy and kindness to the poor and unfortunate, remembered the occasion and related the details of that historical anniversary. She was in her twelfth year and was present at the religious service. She stated that the afternoon was passed in dancing, songs and games, the music having been furnished by the neophytes.

With a genuine romantic touch, Rivera suggested the words: "Encino del Ensueno Dorado", meaning "Oak of the Golden Dream" for a tablet placed by La Mesa Club on the oak tree beneath which Francisco Lopez slept just before making his great discovery.



STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES)

SS.

Señora Doña Francisca Lopez de Belderrain, being first duly sworn, deposes and says:

Doña Catalina Lopez de Lopez, during her life time; THAT she was well acquainted with and knew Señora coverer of gold in Placeritos Canyon and a daughter of Pedro Lopez, who was a brother of Francisco Lopez.

THAT Catalina Lopez de Lopez was the affiant's Grand-Aunt and informed the affiant that she had attended the first anniversary celebration of the gold discovery in Placeritos Canyon on March 9th. 1843, and that she was then eleven years of age; that she and a number of others were, on that occasion, shown the exact location of the gold discovery by Francisco Lopez the previous year and the tree under which Francisco Lopez slept during the afternoon of March 9th. 1842.

THAT in the autumn of 1914, during a family reunion in Placeritos Canyon, the late doña Catalina Lopez de Lopez, took the affiant and others of the Lopez family to the exact spot where he slept his mid-day siesta on March 9th. 1842; that doña Catalina Lopez de Lopez, asserted on that occasion that she had a perfect recollection of the spot and was able to indentify it by the topography, the artificial cut on the side of the hill and the location of the tree and remembered positively, the location of the "enramada" (Chapel made of brush) where in Mass was celebrated on March 9th. 1843; that she, the affiant, has a perfect recollection of the spot then designated by señora doña Catalina Lopez de Lopez and that the spot and site of the first gold discovery in California, is located on the property of Mr. Frank E. Walker in Placeritos Canyon, in the County of Los Angeles, California and more minutely described in an affidavit of this date made and sworn to by Mr. Frank E. Walker and herein attached.

(Signed) Francisca Lopez de Belderrain

Witnesses:

Adolfo G. Rivera (Rubric)

Dolores O. de Rivera (Rubric)

Refugio Belderrain .

Dated in the City of Los Angeles, County of Los Angeles and State of California, on the 23rd. day of the month of February nineteen-- hundred and thirty (1930)

Subscribed and sworn to before me, on this 25th. day of the month of March, nineteen hundred and thirty (1930) in the County of Los Angeles, State of California.

( Signed ) Arthur B. Perkins  
Justice of the Peace. Soledad Township, County of Los Angeles, State of California.

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This is a copy of the original affidavit (in possession of Adolfo G. Rivera) and presented on this date to señora doña Francisca Lopez de Belderrain.  
Los Angeles, California, March 25th. 1930.

Adolfo G. Rivera

Adolfo G. Rivera  
Chairman Historical Landmarks Com'tee  
Ramona Parlor, 109 N.S.G.W.



Placeritos, Los Angeles County.

March 9th. 1930

REMARKS BY Adolfo G. Rivera.

Master of Ceremonies.

FELLOW NATIVES- ADOPTED SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF CALIFORNIA:

This was to be a family party, but enthusiasts among the Native and Adopted Sons, seem to grow, like mushrooms, over night, and daily become more appreciative of the historic romance that surrounds every nook and corner of our state.

This date marks the 88th. anniversary of gold discovery on this very spot, in 1842.

That the world may know, that the historians of the North may learn and that our State authorities may take notice and insert these facts in our school text books, we are unveiling today, a placque over a mound of boulders placed here three quarters of a century or more ago, and but lately unearthed by Mr. F.E. Walker, the owner of these premises.

La Mesa Club, with a membership of Native and Adopted Sons of California, will place a tablet on yonder oak, 'neath whose shade, the discoverer slept his mid-day siesta on that eventful day.

We will establish by documentary evidence, the exact location of the noble oak, and in the near future, erect a magnificent and permanent monument of California Granite boulders, commemorative of the discovery and in honor of the Discoverer, Francisco Lopez, a native Californian.

WE WANT CREDIT GIVEN TO WHOM CREDIT IS DUE !

Today we proclaim and broadcast from over these mountain tops and TOMORROW we will insist that this South-land BE RECOGNIZED in the history-making epochs of our State.







#2236 Cambridge Ave.  
Los Angeles, California.  
July 10, 1930.

Miss Endora G<sup>o</sup>uroutte,  
Chief Californiana Dept.  
State Library, California.

Dear Miss G<sup>o</sup>uroutte:-

At the suggestion of Mr. Leslie Edgar Bliss, librarian at the Huntington library at San Marino, I am forwarding to you manuscript and affidavits, setting forth the facts regarding the first discovery of gold in any quantity in California by my kinsman, Francisco Lopez, to be placed on file as source material in the state library.

The data has been secured with the utmost care by the writer, who received information at first hand from her father and from her aunt, niece of the discoverer. She conducted thorough research in Bancroft's and other old histories of California, from newspaper clippings of the period and other sources. Without doubt there is in the state capitol a copy of the entry of the first gold <sup>in California</sup> minted in the Philadelphia mint in 1843, and if not I would suggest obtaining a copy of such record to add to mine.

Hoping that my manuscript will prove of valuable and hoping to hear from you soon,

I am, yours very truly,

Francisca Lopez de Belderrain



# CREDIT To WHOM

WHERE was gold first discovered in California- Right here in Los Angeles county within a short automobile journey from the metropolis of the Southland.

Notwithstanding the fact that James W. Marshall has been accorded the honor of disclosing to the world in 1848 the first gold in California, it is the avowed purpose of certain loyal residents of the Southland to establish Don Francisco Lopez in history as the first discoverer of gold in California, because of documentary evidence that he found the precious metal in 1842 in Placeritos Cañon, not far from Newhall.

Thus it was that on March 9, last, members and friends of Ramona Parlor of the Native Sons of the Golden West, the Kiwanis Club, the Newhall-Saugus Chamber of Commerce, and La Mesa Club of Los Angeles gathered in force at the site of that gold discovery to unveil a temporary tablet commemorating the historic event.

"This was to be a family party, but enthusiasts among the Native and Adopted Sons seem to grow like mushrooms over night and to become daily more appreciative of the historic romance that surrounds every nook and

corner of our state," said Adolfo G. Rivera, chief of the county's corps of interpreters, who acted as master of ceremonies. "This date marks the 88th an-



Tablet on oak tree under which Francisco Lopez had his siesta on March 9th, 1842

niversary of the discovery of gold on this very spot in 1842. That the world may know, that the historians of the north may learn, that our state authorities may take notice and insert in our school text

books the true facts, we are placing here today a temporary tablet over a mound of boulders placed here three-quarters of a century or more ago and but lately unearthed by Mr. Walker, owner of these premises. Today we proclaim and broadcast over these mountain tops, and tomorrow we will insist that this Southland be recognized in the history-making epochs of our state."

An interesting and illuminating account of the events surrounding this first discovery of gold was given at this ceremony by Señora Francisco Lopez de Belderrain as follows:

The first discovery of gold in California took place in the month of March, 1842, in one of the cañons of the San Francisquito Rancho, later called Placerito cañon, about forty miles northwest of the city of Los Angeles. This ranch first belonged to the Mission of San Fernando, which was founded in 1797 and became a basic center of operations where numerous industries were taught neophytes under the supervision of Spanish teachers.

After secularization of the Missions by the Mexican government, Dona Jacoba Feliz y Lopez de del Valle applied to the government for San Francisquito



On March 9, 1930, Ramona Parlor 109 of the N. S.G. W., together with La Mesa Club and the Kiwanis Club of Newhall and Saugus, unveiled a ta



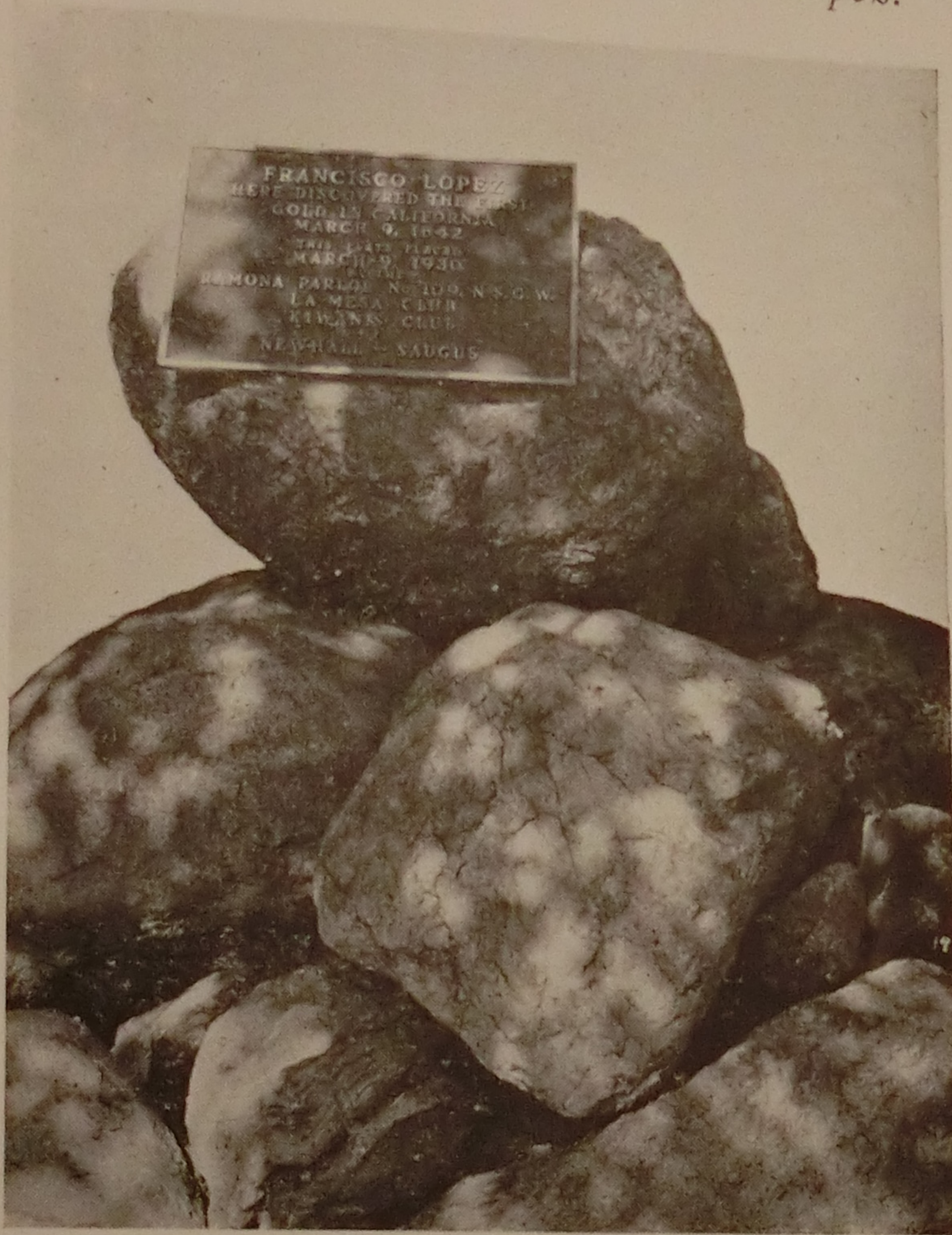
# OM CREDIT IS DUE

*County Employee Takes Leading Part in Ceremonies at Place Where Gold was First Discovered in California Seven Years Before the Historic Gold Rush of '94 -- Story of Event that Brought Renown to Francisco Lopez.*

as a grant for herself and husband, Don Antonio del Valle. The ranch was granted to them. After Don Antonio's demise, the ranch was divided between his widow and children. The former came to Los Angeles to live, her home being near the old Plaza church, where she married Don Jose Salazar. After her marriage she returned with her husband to the ranch to live. This land was later sold to Mr. Newhall and it was in one of its cañons that gold was first discovered in California.

The original discoverer of gold in California was Don Francisco Lopez, second son of Don Juan Lopez and Dona Dolores Salgado, who was a teacher and a member of the school board of Los Angeles, in the "forties."

The public has known Don Francisco as only a vaquero or cowboy, a neophyte of San Fernando Mission. This is erroneous and it is only fair to him, that a glimpse be given into his true status and character. The part he played in the development of the great West should be recognized and his memory perpetuated.



*Boulders marking place where gold was discovered in Placeritos Cañon*

Don Juan was a descendant of an early Spanish-California family. He had two sons, Pedro and Francisco, and two daughters, Ramona and Maria de Jesus. Don Pedro was for many years, mayordomo (general manager) of the mate-

rial affairs pertaining to the Mission of San Fernando at the time when the Mexican government took possession of the Mission and Don Antonio del Valle was its administrator. Don Pedro fulfilled his duties with efficiency.

Don Francisco's tastes were unlike those of his brothers, as he devoted his time to literature and history and was very fond of big game hunting in the mountains. He also took great pleasure in prospecting for gold. In this way he spent his vacations. With his wife he would often spend a week or two at the Rancho of his niece, Dona Jacoba F. L. de Salazar. In fact he rented a section of the San Francisquito ranch for his own stock. Often, attired in a leather hunting suit, he would mount his horse, lay his rifle across the pommel of his saddle, and with his hunting knife fastened to his belt, would start for the mountains to take a look at his stock and interview his vaqueros. He was always accompanied by a trusted servant carrying his mochila (saddle bags) containing prospectors' tools.



*Newhall and Saugus unveiled a tablet over a mound of Boulders, where Gold was first discovered in California by Francisco Lopez on March 9, 1842*





*A. G. Rivera presents "Bear Flag" to Mr. and Mrs Walker*

Each time he spied a cropping of rock having the appearance of mineral, he would dismount and break off bits of the rock, examine them attentively, then fill his mochila with the pieces to take home for a more thorough examination, but invariably his prospecting met with disappointment.

Don Francisco was a well educated man of high ideals. He received his education in the city of Mexico, where he studied French, as his paternal ancestors were proficient in that language. He was reserved and ceremonious. His appearance and manners were those of a caballero or gentleman of that period.

One fine morning in the spring of 1842, when making one of his periodical visits to his niece's ranch, Don Francisco made preparations for an all-day outing in the mountains. It was the lenten season and the country was luxuriant with verdure. As he was bidding goodbye to his wife, she asked him to bring her some wild onions which grew in abundance in the canyons. After inspecting the stock, and taking a hard stroll up and down the mountains, he felt rather fatigued, and, as the hour of noon had arrived, he selected a shady tree under which to rest and have lunch. Recently the tree has been acclaimed the oldest in Southern California. It is an oak, said to be 500 years old.

He alighted from his horse and his servant spread a zarape or Mexican blanket on the ground, unsaddled his

master's horse and placed the saddle on one end of the zarape that it might serve as a head rest. The boy then made the coffee and served the lunch.

After a lengthy siesta, Don Francisco awoke and suddenly remembered his wife's request. Taking the knife from his belt, he went to the slope near by and began to dig up some of the wild onions. Noticing some yellow particles clinging to the roots, he examined them wonder-

ingly. He shook the earth from the roots, set them down and started to dig again with vigor. Upon examining the earth closely, he suddenly started to his feet and shouted, "GOLD!" I have found it at last! Gold! Gold!

He continued digging and found more and more. The boy awoke thoroughly frightened by the shouting, thinking his master had gone mad. He was calmed with difficulty and made to help dig. Don Francisco then filled his mochila with the precious earth and rushed back to the rancho with the glad news, where his wife and niece with the rest of the household joined him in rejoicing at the good fortune he had at last attained in his ambition after many years of fruitless prospecting.

At that time all the women rode horseback, on side saddles, and next morning everybody rode to the Mission at San Fernando to impart the great news to Pedro, the brother of Francisco. There was a happy family reunion at the Mission that evening. When supper was over, the Rosary was said and hymns sung. Afterwards a set or two of quadrilles were danced. At sunrise the next morning, Don Francisco started for Los Angeles in company with his brother and some friends with servants following to notify the governmental authorities of his discovery. The Poblanos (townspeople) were greatly excited over the news. Soon an emissary was des-

*Turn to Page Twenty-seven*



*Prominent at the celebration were (left to right) Herman C. Lichtenberger, Senator R. F. Del Valle, F. E. Walker, Mrs. Francisco Lopez Belderrain, and Adolfo G. Rivera.*



CREDIT TO WHOM CREDIT IS DUE  
Continued from Page Sixteen

patched to the city of Mexico with the joyful report. When Governor Alvarado was informed of the gold discovery he bestowed an expediente or official title on Don Francisco in recognition of the merits of his find, and at the same time he appointed Don Ygnacio del Valle, Encargado de Justicia. (The record of this is found in the Historical Society of Southern California's records, Vol. 8. "Commissioner of Justice.")

"Again and again," says Mr. Charles J. Prudhomme, an authority on early California history, "we read that to James W. Marshall belongs the credit of first having discovered gold in California." They say that often a falsehood well stuck to, or asserted with confidence and boldness, is as good as the truth. The aphorism seems well supported, for while that has been believed and stated by many, the writer of this is prepared to show with an affidavit that it is a grievous error. Also an error in history, which assigns the honor and credit due one man, to another who cannot justly claim it. We will proceed to set forth in detail and give ample proof that James W. Marshall was not the original discoverer of gold in California, nor was Sutter's Mill, the locality. On the contrary, the discovery was first made by Don Francisco Lopez and in Southern California, several years prior to the alleged discovery by Mr. Marshall; in fact in 1842 and at the locality known as Placerito Canyon.

Don Francisco's second discovery was made in the following year, 1843, at a place known as San Feliciano. We are also prepared to show that another person, Don Mariano Lopez, made the third discovery of gold at the College Farm, near Santa Inez Mission, in Santa Barbara County, in 1843.

"Don Francisco Lopez, as the true, first and pioneer discoverer of gold in California in the year 1842, has, up to the present time, not been publicly accorded the recognition that is his due. This may have arisen from various causes. It may possibly be accounted for, in part, because of his nationality, for at that early date, so soon after the Mexican War and the United States coming in, there was naturally some prejudice against the Spanish population, and no particular desire on the part of writers, to give them prominence. This is a rushing world. Thus it often happens that a man or his reputation is the victim of

circumstances. For this reason we present copies of the affidavit of the first gold discovery in California in 1842.

"The following Transcript Records were once owned by Cyrus Lyons, whom, in his youth, came to the Pueblo de Los Angeles, in 1849; by his daily report we find as follows, that in 1842, about 45 miles northwest from the Pueblo de Los Angeles, were discovered the Placerito or placer mines by Francisco Lopez, and that in the same year, he discovered the San Feliciano Placer mines.

"In 1843 Francisco Garcia was piloted to, and shown by Francisco Lopez, his two discoveries in order that he might see the number of miners needed for the work. Senor Garcia returned to Sonora, Mexico, and in the course of six months came back with thirty Mexican gambusinos or placer miners. These miners were divided. Some went to Placerito and some to San Feliciano. From the former place they took out 212 pounds of gold avoirdupois. It was weighed by David W. Alexander who, in the year 1855, made an affidavit to this effect.

"Jose Salazar, who came from Sonora, Mexico, went to the San Feliciano mines in the latter part of 1843 and from a place he was working took out forty-two thousand dollars worth of nuggets.

"In 1854, Don Francisco Lopez took me, Cyrus Lyons and my brother, Sanford, to an oil spring from which the padres of San Fernando Mission carried the oil in rawhide bags to the Mission, where it was distilled for lighting purposes. We also visited the gold fields, heretofore referred to, and obtained from him all the information and history of the discovery of the gold mines in the possession of Don Francisco Lopez.

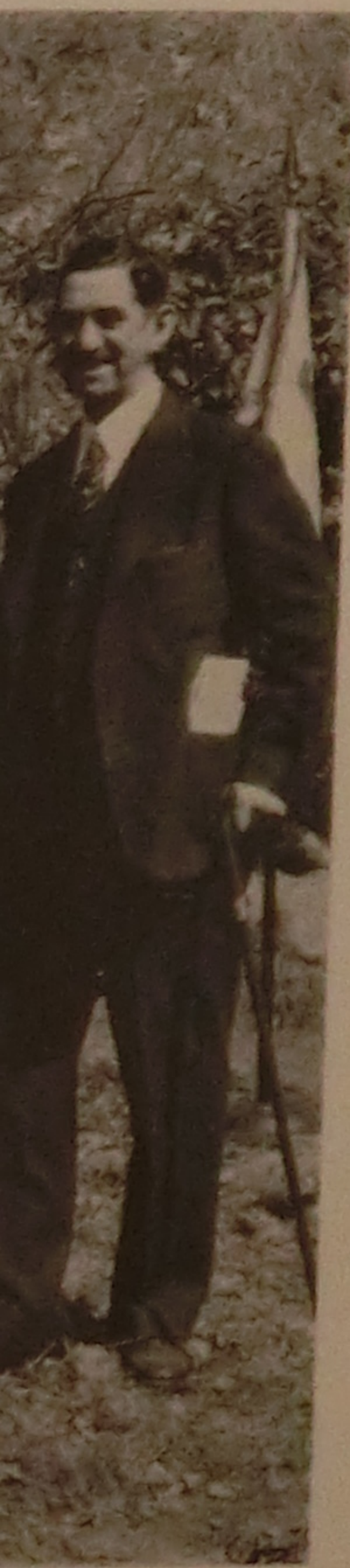
"During the years of 1850 to 1858, there were not less than 6000 people mining for gold in the Placerito and San Feliciano mines.

"In the year 1858, I, Cyrus Lyons, purchased from Jose Espinoza, one nugget he found, from which I realized \$1,928. This was the largest piece known to have been taken from this locality."

Mr. Prudhomme continues: "Concerning the gold discovery, we will remark that for the most part, the present generation really does not understand the true history of the gold discovery in California. James W. Marshall has been honored as the ideal pioneer in this discovery. However, for the sake of history and those whom it may concern, I will point out this fact: Let Mr. Marshall

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ator R. F. Del  
Rivera.



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have the credit due him for having been the first person to discover gold at Sutter's Fort in the year 1848, but let all who will, investigate and freely acknowledge, irrespective of racial preference, that the real pioneer and first discoverer of gold in California was not James W. Marshall, but Don Francisco Lopez, at Placerito Canyon, in 1842.

"Lastly we will add: Let the truth of history be known, let justice be done, though the heavens fall. Let James W. Marshall yield up the laurels of fame as the first discoverer of gold in California to the brow of Don Francisco Lopez to whom they justly belong."

Nearly all the historians in the state of California mention the first discovery of gold in the state, which took place in March, 1842. The Historical Society of Southern California, Vol. 8, page 228, copies part of J. M. Quinn's account of it, which says that the first parcel of California gold dust that ever was coined in the United States mint in Philadelphia was taken from the products of the mines of the Placerito, and was carried in a vessel around Cape Horn. It consisted of 18.34 ounces, and was deposited in the mint, July 8th, 1843, by Alfred Robinson. Its value after coining was \$344.75, over \$19.00 an ounce. It was sent by Don Abel Stearns.

Mr. William Heath Davis, in his "Sixty Years in California," places the amount at \$80,000 to \$100,000 for the first two years after the discovery.

The editor of the "Star" of San Francisco, in the issue of December 3rd, 1869, says: "In the spring of 1862, Wells, Fargo and Company were shipping to San Francisco, \$12,000.00 worth of gold dust per month by steamer, and probably as much more was sent by other shippers or taken by private parties; all this the product of San Fernando, San Gabriel and Santa Anita. Add to this estimate the amount taken out of San Fernando placers from 1842 to 1847, and all the other mines, except at the San Gabriel, from 1855 down to the present time and the yield of the Los Angeles placer mines would reach, if not exceed, five million dollars."

Mofras, the French historian, says in Vol. 1, page 489: "The only mine active in the country today, is at this time, in the ledge of virgin gold near the Mission of San Fernando, which a Frenchman by the name of M. Baric exploits and which yields almost an ounce of pure gold a day."



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Continued from Page Twenty-eight

In the spring of 1843, Don Francisco wished to commemorate the anniversary of the great historical event with a solemn high mass. A provisional chapel was therefore built on the very spot where the gold was first found. Ovens and enramadas or orbors were built and everything was made ready for the celebration. Several carretas were sent to the place the day before with the food supplies. The walls of the chapel were hung inside with richly embroidered shawls and the floor was covered with bear skins and those of other wild animals. The altar was built on the side of the hill, which had been levelled for the purpose. Three priests, two from San Fernando Mission and one from Los Angeles, celebrated mass. Six altar boys and the whole choir from the Mission, eight musicians and ten singers, all neophytes, took part.

Many prominent families of Los Angeles and Santa Barbara as well as from the surrounding country, were present, including men commissioned by the Mexican government to investigate the aforesaid discovery. Many games typical of the period were played, and a barbecue was served under the big oak tree where Don Francisco had napped. It was a gala day. Officers in their uniforms and women in their brocades and richly embroidered shawls formed a picturesque scene.

In the autumn of 1914, the late Dona Catalina Lopez de Lopez, niece of the gold discoverer and later the wife of Don Geronimo Lopez, invited all her children, grandchildren, their children, her nieces and near relatives to a picnic near the spot where the mass celebrating the discovery of gold had been held. Dona Catalina who was well known for her philanthropy and kindness to the poor and unfortunate, remembered the occasion and related the details of that historical anniversary. She was in her twelfth year and was present at the religious service. She stated that the afternoon was passed in dancing, songs and games, the music having been furnished by the neophytes.

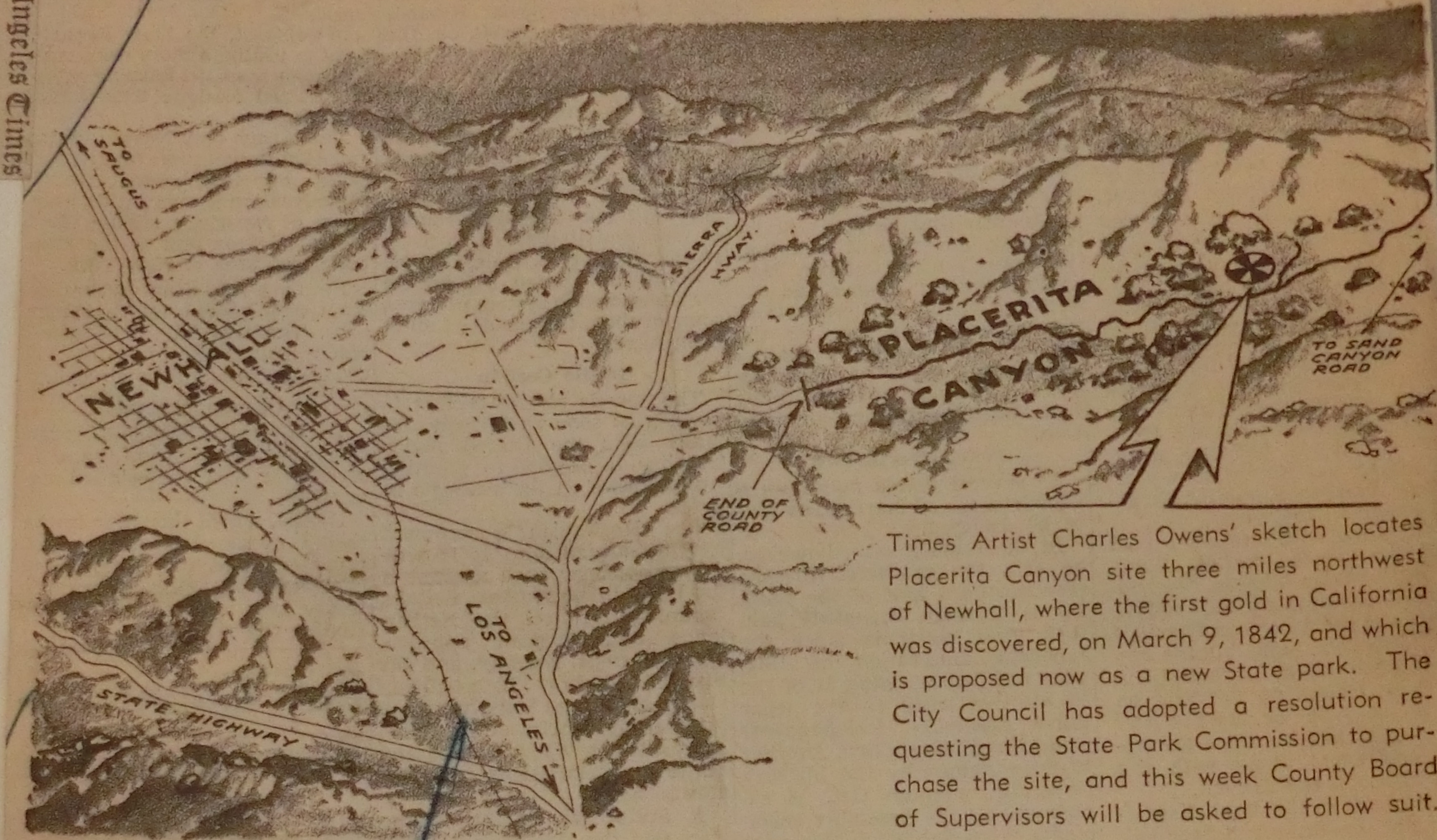
With a genuine romantic touch, Rivera suggested the words: "Encino Del Ensueno Dorado," meaning "Oak of the Golden Dream," for a tablet placed by La Mesa Club on the oak tree beneath which Francisco Lopez slept just before making his great discovery.

4 Los Angeles Times  
Post I-MONDAY, JAN. 20, 1947



# Site of Gold Discovery Here Proposed as New State Park

4 Los Angeles Times  
Part I—MONDAY, JAN. 20, 1947



Times Artist Charles Owens' sketch locates Placerita Canyon site three miles northwest of Newhall, where the first gold in California was discovered, on March 9, 1842, and which is proposed now as a new State park. The City Council has adopted a resolution requesting the State Park Commission to purchase the site, and this week County Board of Supervisors will be asked to follow suit.

Story on Page 12, Part I

**SITE**—Three times vandals have stolen the plaques set up in Placerita Canyon marking the point where gold first was discovered in California. But the rugged oak tree under which Don Francisco Lopez is said to have rested one day in 1842, still stands, and the spot at which he arose to pluck a wild onion and accidentally un-

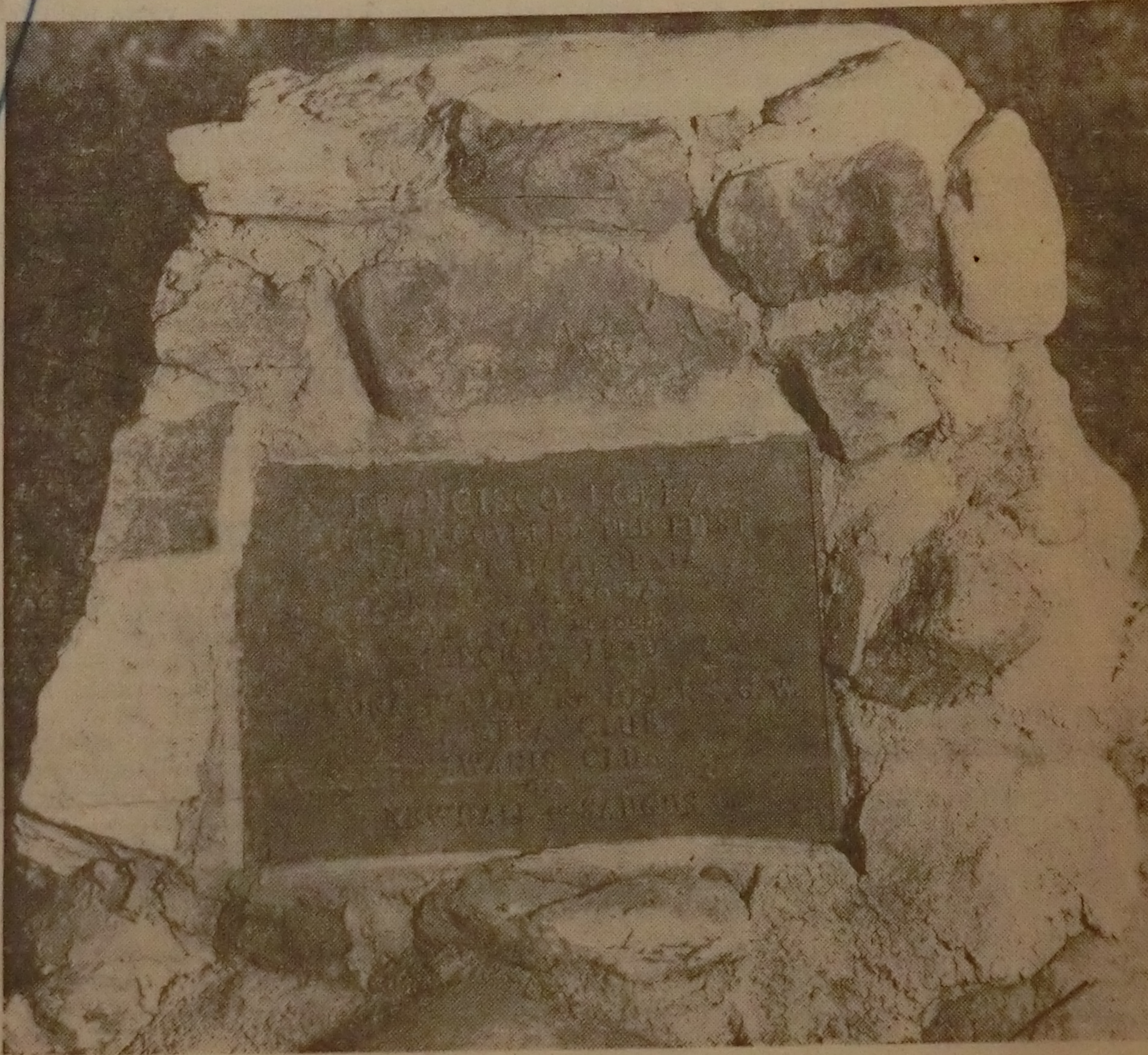
## County to Urge State Buy Site at First Gold Find

Purchase by the state of the spot where gold was first discovered in California, in Placerita Canyon, near Newhall, will be urged tomorrow by the Board of Supervisors.

Supervisor Roger Jessup, in whose district the canyon is located, will present the resolution.

Gold was discovered in Placerita Canyon in 1842, six years before the discovery at Sutter's Mill, Northern California, Jessup points out.

Don Francisco Lopez was the discoverer. He found a nugget when he pulled a wild onion from the ground.



**PLAQUE**—This marker establishing the point at which gold first was unearthed in California was dedicated by Native Sons of Golden West and other service groups.