

Madera County

The historic Madera County Courthouse in Madera.
Madera, Chowchilla, Oakhurst, San Joaquin River, North
Fork, Ahwahnee, Wassama State Historical Park, Raymond.



Madera County

Madera County Data

Population: 123,109 (Rank: 35)

Land Area (square miles): 2,136 (Rank: 24)

Madera did not become a county until 1893. Originally it was part of Mariposa County and in 1855 it became part of Fresno County. Madera is the Spanish word for “lumber” which was the first major industry.

The county extends from the San Joaquin River, which runs down the middle of the valley to the crest of the Sierras. The eastern half of the county includes the foothills and the Sierra Mountains. The southern part of Yosemite National Park is located in the county as well as the Devil’s Postpile National Monument. The latter is a unique rock formation. Molten lava extruded from a fissure at a temperature that caused it to crystallize into hexagonal shapes. The national monument cannot be reached from the western side of the Sierras. The entrance is from Mammoth Lakes in Mono County.

Today, as with nearly all valley counties, Highway 99 is the main route. Highway 41 also cuts through the county from Fresno on its way to Yosemite. In 1919 a group called the Gold Chain Club was formed to lobby the state to pave what was then called Bootjack Road. In 1921 the state legislature declared Highway 49 the Mother Lode Highway but it stopped at Mariposa. In 1962 Bootjack Road became Highway 49 and 49’s southern end became Oakhurst.

The Gold Rush of ’49 was the driving force for settlement in the Mother Lode, and farming was for settlement in the valley. Madera was slow to develop on both counts.

Introduction

California is comprised of 58 counties. The state, the third largest in the U.S., has the greatest diversity of geography of any of the states. It has huge deserts, high mountain ranges, fertile valleys and a 1000 mile coastline. Beginning in 2001 my wife and I began to travel and photograph the state as a retirement hobby.

In 2009 we published a CD containing about 4,000 photos of the regions of the state. Since that time we have added about 10,000 more photos to our collection. It was also at this time (December 2008) I began to send a photographic diary of our trips to friends and people with an interest in California geography.

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Early trappers, Mexican land grant holders, and gold seekers had little luck and most did not stay very long.

One who did was Jim Savage. Savage was an early settler of the area and employed Chinese workers to mine gold for him along the San Joaquin River. In his early years he fought the local Indians. Later he made peace with the five Indian tribes of the area by marrying a girl from each tribe. He is credited with being the first white man to see Yosemite.

There was a gold rush in 1859. Coarsegold, Finegold, Grab Gulch, Ahwahnee, and Nippinawasee were gold mining communities founded during this time. Mining continued until the early part of the 20th Century. There is still a famous granite quarry operating at Raymond.

Cities: Chowchilla, Madera.



Madera

(April 2002)



Madera

The town began as a lumber town. It was founded by the California Lumber Co. in 1876 when it built a 63 mile long flume to carry logs from the mountains to a sawmill. The town was incorporated in 1907. The flume was closed in 1931. (April 2002)



Madera

(April 2002)



Madera

(April 2002)



Madera

(April 2002)



Madera

(April 2002)



Madera

(April 2002)



Madera

2023





MADERA TO YOSEMITE STAGE ROUTE EST. 1879



SWITCHING FROM THE IRON HORSE TO THE HORSE DRAWN STAGE. AFTER A NIGHT AT MADERA'S YOSEMITE HOTEL WHICH STILL STANDS ACROSS THE STREET FROM THIS MONUMENT. AT 6 AM THE TOURISTS WOULD LOAD UP IN OPEN STAGES TO ENABLE THEM A GOOD VIEW STAGECOACHES. BY THEIR ENCLOSED DESIGN WERE UNPOPULAR. EACH TRIP TO YOSEMITE VALLEY TOOK 2 OR 3 DAYS. DEPENDING ON THE LOAD. ROAD CONDITIONS OR OTHER DELAYS. SUCH AS THE MANY STAGE HOLDUPS. ONE WOMAN FROM WHOM 20 DOLLARS WAS TAKEN SAID. I WOULDN'T HAVE MISSED IT FOR 100.

IT TOOK APPROXIMATELY 72 HORSES FOR EACH TRIP TO YOSEMITE VALLEY. EACH STAGE LINE OWNED ABOUT 600 HORSES AND HAD TO PROVIDE A STAGE STOP TO CHANGE HORSES EVERY 7 OR 8 MILES. IN IT'S HEYDAY THERE WERE MANY STAGES LINED UP IN FRONT OF THE HOTEL EVERY MORNING.

IN 1886 WITH THE COMPLETION OF THE RAILROAD TO WILDCAT STATION (RAYMOND) IN THE FOOTHILLS AND OUT OF THE INFAMOUS VALLEY MUD. THE ROUTES BUSIEST DAYS WERE GONE.

IN 1941 THE U.P.A. AND THE CALIFORNIA PUBLIC WORKS COMPLETED A THEN MODERN HIGHWAY TO FRESNO. MADERA AGAIN HAD A MAJOR STAGE (MOTORIZED) LINE TO YOSEMITE.



MADERA-GATEWAY TO YOSEMITE
DEDICATED BY E. CLAMPUS VITUS
GRUB-GUTCH CHAPTER 41-49

9/25/99



Chowchilla

(May 2003)



Chowchilla

The city was founded as an agricultural development scheme. It received a post office in 1912 and became incorporated in 1923. (May 2003)



Chowchilla

(May 2003)



Chowchilla

(May 2003)



Chowchilla

(May 2003)



Snowchilla

(May 2003)



Chowchilla

(May 2003)



Chowchilla

(May 2003)

**CHOWCHILLA
COMMUNITY
SPORTS CENTER**



Oakhurst

Oakhurst received a post office in 1873 when it was known as Fresno Flats. The name was changed in 1912. The population is 2,829. (November 2003)



Oakhurst

(November 2003)



Oakhurst

(November 2003)



San Joaquin River

A P.G. & E power house on the San Joaquin River. (May 2005)



San Joaquin River

Power House Road which goes down into the San Joaquin River Canyon on the way to North Fork. (May 2005)



San Joaquin River

(May 2005)



San Joaquin River

(May 2005)



North Fork

The population is 3,360 and received its first post office in 1888. Timber was the chief industry until the lumber mill closed in the 1990's. (May 2005)



North Fork

(May 2005)



North Fork

(May 2005)



North Fork

(May 2005)



North Fork

(May 2005)



North Fork

(May 2005)



North Fork

(May 2005)



North Fork

(May 2005)



North Fork

(May 2005)



North Fork

(May 2005)



North Fork

(May 2005)



Wassama Round House SHP – Ahwahnee

This former Indian village is still used by Native Americans for ceremonies.
(May 2005)



Ahwahnee

(May 2005)



Ahwahnee

(May 2005)





Wassama Round House SHP – Ahwahnee

(May 2005)



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(May 2005)



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(May 2005)



Wassama Round House SHP – Ahwahnee

(May 2005)



Raymond

The first post office was built in 1886. Its name originally Wildcat Station.
(February 2011)



Raymond

The town is the site of a large granite quarry that is still in operation.
(February 2011)



Raymond

(February 2011)



Raymond

(February 2011)



Raymond

(February 2011)



Raymond

(February 2011)



Raymond

(February 2011)



Raymond

(February 2011)



Raymond

(February 2011)



Raymond

This is a former school which now serves as a church. It is across the road from the quarry. (February 2011)



Raymond

The quarry. (February 2011)



Raymond

(February 2011)

