

MR. OLIVER FINE

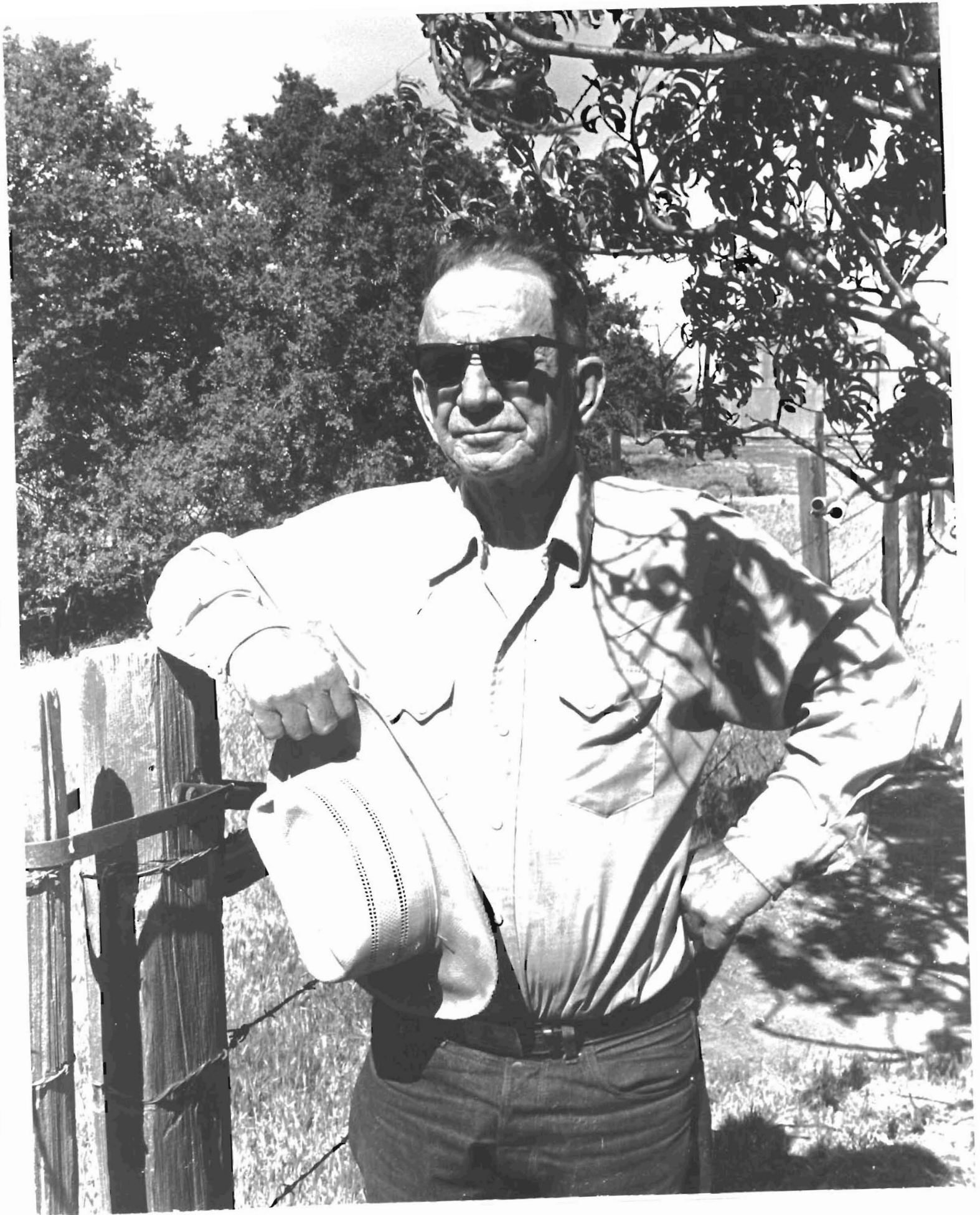
on

LA GRANGE GOLD DREDGES
(1906--1951)

by

Richard L. Dyer

A Tape Recorded Interview



Interview with Mr. Oliver Fine (Tape #1)

This tape recorded interview is with Mr. Oliver, Ollie, Fine, rancher and long-time resident of La Grange in Stanislaus County. It is being conducted by Richard L. Dyer on the 21st of March, 1972 at La Grange.

Tape #1, Side A General Topics

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Grandparents (Granfall)

Parents

Birth date and place

Brothers and sisters

Childhood activities in La Grange

Vocation

Changes during lifetime

Tape #1, Side B

Gold Dredges

Feasibility of dredging Tuolumne River and nearby

Tuolumne River dredges

1906 dredge

1934 dredge

Dredge south of river (1938 - 1951)

Dredge owners

Selecting the site

Operating the dredge

Digging the pound

Crews

Dredging

The gold

Interview with Mr. Oliver Fine (Tape #2)

Tape #2, Side A General Topics

Operating the dredge (Cont'd)

The workers

Platinum discovery

Power source

The digger

The stacker

Regulatory laws

Salmon beds

Polluting the river

Attitude of residents

Effect on the land

Rock for Don Pedro Dam

Restoration of land

Future

Preservation of dredge

Feasible to resume operation

Tape #2, Side B

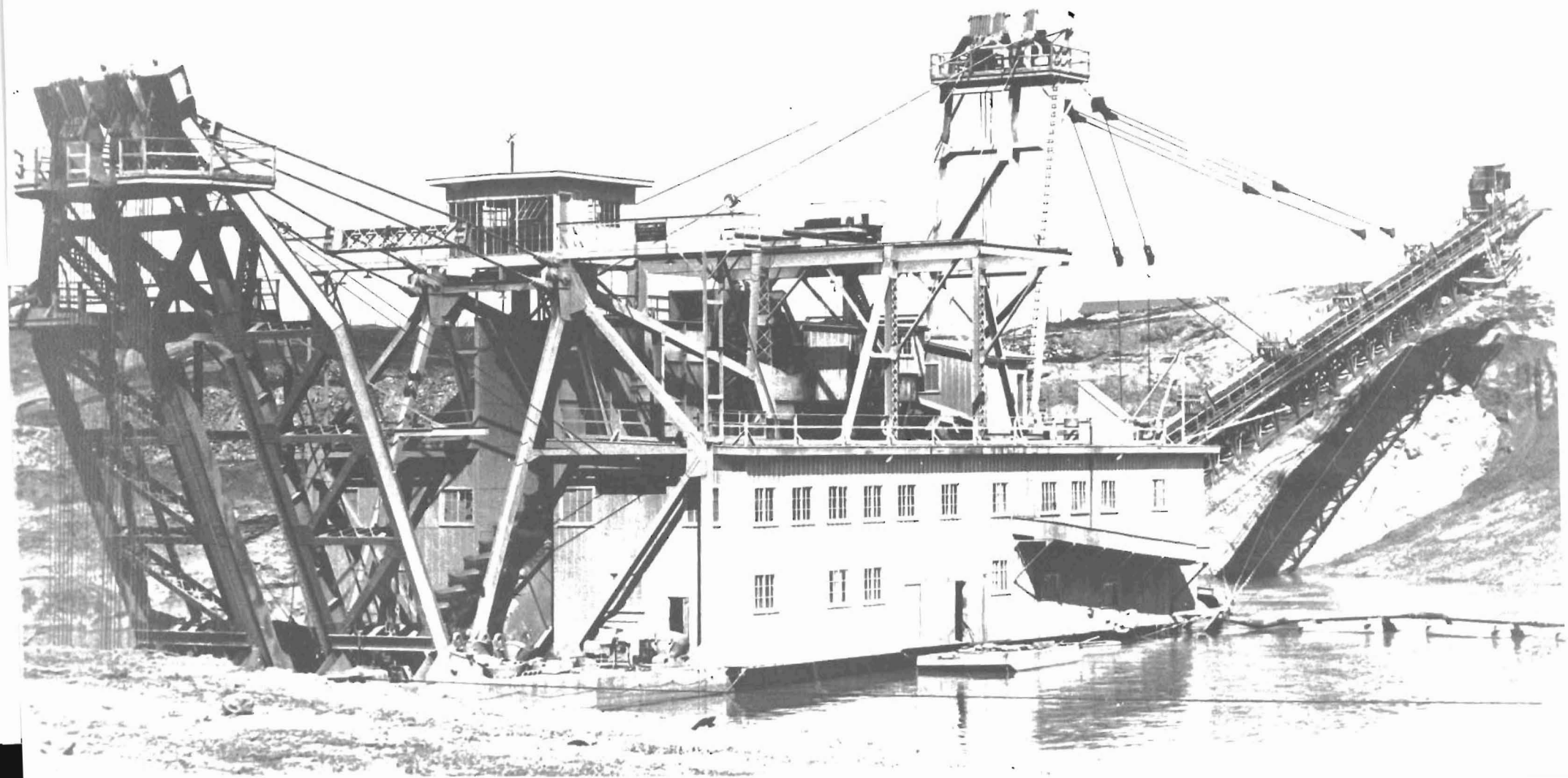
Winch room on dredge

Sluice room on dredge

Near the dredge

Plans for a public park

















After years of controversy, the dredge is saved

By Nancy Neher

Bee staff writer

The La Grange gold dredge — subject of hopes and dreams for Stanislaus County history buffs who worked endless hours to save the rusting monster — may soon be the property of the Stanislaus County Historical Society.

Dredge owner Dal Soule of Susanville has agreed to give the six-story machine to the non-profit historical society as a tax shelter maneuver, said Richard L. Belt, society member who headed the defeated effort to raise \$50,000 to purchase the dredge.

"We are delighted," Belt said. "After struggling more than three years, this came as a bolt out of the blue."

The county Board of Supervisors, which lost \$19,000 last year when a community fund raising drive failed to come close to its \$50,000 goal, did not greet the news with as much enthusiasm.

At yesterday's meeting, Supervisor Joash Paul, in whose district the dredge stands, told board members he had good and bad news about the dredge.

The good was the historical society had received a commitment from Soule. The bad was the board was being asked to forgive the \$1,443.75 in personal property taxes due from the owner by Aug. 31.

County Counsel Gilbert Boyne said the Board of Supervisors had no authority to forgive taxes. Other board members did not comment on the announcement, and Paul admitted after the meeting, "My enthusiasm (about the dredge) has waned a lot."

Undaunted, Belt, who was not at the board meeting, said the society has some money remaining from the more than \$3,000 collected during the fund raising campaign which could be used to pay the tax bill.

"We'll go ahead and pay the taxes and hope the county will refund them later," Belt said.

Although some details still are sketchy, yesterday's announcement

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adds another chapter to the history of the six-story monster which over the years has been the victim of vandalism and neglect.

Belt said he has remained in contact with dredge owner Soule since the defeated fund raising campaign. Earlier this month he visited the family to discuss a suggestion that the dredge be donated to the nonprofit society as a tax write-off over a five-year period.

Once the transaction is completed, Belt sees the historical society asking only a "modest sum" from the county for maintenance. After the five years have lapsed, he said, the organization

may turn the title over to the county.

Ultimately, Belt said the society may ask that the county finance rebuilding of the structure so tours can be conducted.

In the meantime, Belt said the local firm of Robert Ford and Associates will be asked to appraise the almost 40-year-old machine to satisfy Internal Revenue Service regulations. Belt said the appraisal will be based on the county assessor's figures, and its economic and historical value.

Last month, Assessor K. V. Broadwell announced that the assessed valuation of the rusting dredge had been raised to match Soule's offer to the county—\$70,000. A 400 per cent boost in valuation from the \$16,000 he paid in a 1968 estate sale.

Soule's taxes are paid until Aug. 31, an assessor's spokesperson said today, when he — if still the owner — will owe \$1,443.75.

Built in 1938 at a cost of \$543,000 and operated by the Tuolumne Gold Dredging Co. until it was abandoned in 1949, the dredge lay idle and ignored in a pond two miles south of La Grange for almost 20 years.

Then in 1968, Soule purchased the derelict machine and once again the attraction of gold filled the air.

Soule advertised the dredge for sale in mining journals for as much as \$100,000. Finding no takers, he offered to sell the idle hulk of wood and metal for \$50,000 to the county to be included in its La Grange Gold Rush Park.

The county declined the offer and Soule found an Australian firm which reportedly planned to buy the machine for \$80,000, dismantle and move it across the ocean to be reassembled near Perth.

(CONTINUED)



Bee Photo

The La Grange gold dredge, idle and untended.

Hughson rancher Dave Orth, one of the most active dredge supporters, was the first to report the Australian deal had fallen through. On his own Orth signed an option to purchase the machine from Soule for \$70,000.

Orth gave \$1,000 and persuaded the

Board of Supervisors to put up \$19,000 to secure a one-year option based on the Stanislaus County Historical Society's promise to raise the remaining \$50,000.

But, after a 14-month fund raising effort which included a range of

events from barbecues to art auction and from which stickers declaring "Help a Gold Digger, Save the Dredge" blossomed on bumpers and walls throughout Stanislaus County, the society in June 1975 was forced to admit defeat with only \$3,716 netted.