

Where did “Rocklin” come from?

Gary Day



“Rock-Pool” aptly describes Rocklin’s rainwater-filled quarries even today

Our city’s name first appeared in print in June 1864 when “Rocklin” appeared in a Central Pacific Railroad timetable as a stop between Junction (now Roseville) and Pino (now Loomis). But how did the name “Rocklin” originate? And if the coiners wanted to recognize the rock of our granite outcroppings and quarries, why didn’t they name our city more conventionally with something like Rockland or Graniteville?

Stan Rocklin of Fairfax, Virginia thought that he might know the answer. “...My grandfather Rocklin told me that a distant relative was involved in building the railroads in the West” he said. “Grandfather also told

me that a town had been named for that relative”.

Could that town have been our Rocklin?

According to a Sacramento Railroad Museum archivist, it was common practice in the 1860s, during construction of the transcontinental railroad, for the Central Pacific to name passenger stations for locally famous people. For example according to the Loomis Historical Society, the town of Loomis is named for its first stationmaster.

But none of Rocklin’s 19th century census records show a person named Rocklin and railroad archives don’t show an 1860’s employee named Rocklin either. Stan Rocklin and his friends have searched genealogically via the Internet since 2002 and have not yet identified a “Rocklin” in California who can be connected with the naming of our city.

Another theory about Rocklin’s name, one expressed in some of Rocklin’s written histories, is that “Rocklin” is a corruption of “Rockland” or a Finnish equivalent.

However according to former Rocklin Mayor, Roy Ruhkala, Rocklin has never been named “Rockland” and “Rocklin” has no meaning in the Finnish language. Ruhkala quickly points out however that, in his experience on the Rocklin City Council, city offices sometimes received mail erroneously addressed to Rockland, California.

A third theory about the origination of our city’s name is that “Rocklin” originated in the Gaelic of early Irish settlers. Evidence for the Irish connection is circumstantial but compelling.

In the United State Census of 1860, most of historic Rocklin was called “Secret Ravine”. The population was possibly centered near today’s Secret Ravine neighborhood, the area of homes, open fields and oaks that we see today on the southeast side of Interstate 80 between Roseville and Loomis.

Secret Ravine’s 1860 census counted 440 people. 72 were Irish born. 47 Irishmen sluiced for gold in Secret Ravine’s creeks.

Michael Keating was the local innkeeper. Tom Maloney was the shoemaker. James Bolton owned the farm that he subdivided to form Rocklin’s original town site in 1866. All of these men were Irish. By their numbers in 1860, Irishmen were our area’s dominant immigrant group.

According to Ruhkala there are no enduring memories of the Irish among Rocklin's old-timers as there are of the Finns who first came here in large numbers the 1880's and the Spanish who arrived here by way of Hawaii in the early 20th century. Our next glimpse of Irish population density is the 1870 census which shows that during the 1860s Irish miners had abandoned their sluice boxes and settled into railroad jobs. Irishmen made up the largest group of foreign-born Rocklin Roundhouse workers. And based on the Irish names attached to some of Rocklin's 19th century quarries some Irishmen were in the granite business also.

Rocklin had probably not been named as of March 1864 when the transcontinental railroad tracks reached our area from Sacramento. A *Sacramento Union* article that month refers to our downtown area as merely the "granite quarries at the end of the tracks".

Ireland's capital, Dublin, is named for a pool of dark water at the confluence of 2 rivers. "Dublin" is made up of 2 truncated Gaelic words "Dubh" for black and "linn" for pool. Noticing how winter rainwater pools-up in Rocklin's quarries and fancifully combining English with Gaelic to mimic the construct of "Dublin", Rocklin's Irishmen might have named our town "rock" for the granite and "lin" for the pools. "Rock pool" aptly describes Rocklin's rainwater filled quarries and wintertime puddles among downtown granite outcroppings even today.

The origin of Rocklin's name remains a mystery. Stan Rocklin's clan continues the search. But Rocklin might owe its name to the whimsy of early Irish settlers.