

San Bernardino County history: Calico Ghost Town

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Calico Ghost Town, circa 1935.

Three miles north of Interstate 15, midway between Barstow and Yermo, CA, sits the historic and restored Calico Ghost Town. On April 6, 1881, prospectors discovered silver in the surrounding mountains, claiming it as the Silver King Mine and thereby forming the town of Calico.

In 1884, state mineralogists reported that 70% of the silver produced in the state was from San Bernardino County, nearly 80% of this was from the Calico district. As a result, Calico's population grew significantly, and due to its distance from the city of San Bernardino, it established its own sheriff, courthouse and judicial district.

Over 30 years, the Calico mines produced an estimated \$86 million worth of silver and \$45 million worth of borax, a mineral used in detergents, cosmetics and enamel glazes. With the silver market declining in the 1890s, and borax mining ending in 1907, Calico became a ghost town.

In 1951, Walter Knott, a farmer known for creating Knott's Berry Farm amusement park and Knott's Berry Farm jelly, purchased Calico. As a child, Knott spent a lot of time in Calico, living with his uncle. During World War I, he helped build a plant to recover silver from the Silver King Mine.

After purchasing Calico, Knott began restoring it to its original condition by referencing old photographs from the 1880s. In 1966, he donated Calico to San Bernardino County. Knott's dedication to restoring Calico was inspired by his uncle, John King, one of the first prospectors to lay a silver claim at the Silver King Mine.

Today, Calico Ghost Town is part of the San Bernardino County Regional Parks system with shops, restaurants, camping and outdoor recreation available to guests. Some structures still stand dating back to the town's operational years such as Lil's Saloon and the Lane House & Museum.

In 2005, Calico Ghost Town was designated State Historical Landmark 782 and was proclaimed by then Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to be California's official Silver Rush Ghost Town. To learn more about Calico, please visit <https://parks.sbcounty.gov/park/calico-ghost-town-regional-park/>.

The information in this historical feature was originally part of a video series produced by the Assessor-Recorder-County Clerk's office.