



Sulphur Works Lodge ca. 1941

Mathias B. Supan came to America looking for a new life. He found one in northern California at a place he dubbed Dr. Supan's Paint Mine, known today as Sulphur Works. As the area surrounding Sulphur Works became Lassen Volcanic National Park, there was much tension between the Supan family and the park. Both parties saw potential in the Sulphur Works area. In the end, the park was able to purchase what is now a popular stop for visitors to explore Lassen's most accessible hydrothermal area.

## Dr. Supan's Paint Mine

Mathias B. Supan was born to Austrian parents on February 22, 1827. In 1848, the Austrian Revolution began, during which Mathias was ordered to execute a fellow soldier who had been court-martialed; he refused. For this, Mathias was forced to leave Austria. With money in his pocket, knowledge of several languages, and a background in medicine and chemistry, Mathias set out for a new life.

Mathias married Angeline Cornelius in 1850 in Missouri and soon the couple was looking west. They set out for California in 1853. Mathias would never strike it big in gold, but in 1865 he stumbled upon something just as valuable to him, a small sulfur laden valley within the southern Cascade Range.

During the summer months, Mathias worked at Dr. Supan's Paint Mine—today's Sulphur Works—to mine minerals. The sulfur was refined and used for medicines, clay was used to make bricks and earthenware, and iron was used to make blue dyes.

During the winter months, Mathias lived in the Sacramento Valley with his wife and nine children. He practiced medicine at Brooks Drug Store in Red Bluff and made such remedies as Supan's Sour Powder, Baby Colic, and Rheumatic Remedy.

Mathias passed away in 1904 followed closely by his wife in 1907, both at the age of 77. It would be a few years before their children would realize the full potential of the Sulphur Works area.

## A New Generation

Milton C. Supan used the Little Hot Springs Valley as cattle grazing land beginning in 1903, however, the rest of the Supan family showed little interest in proving their claim to the area until the establishment of Lassen Volcanic National Park in 1916.

Eight family members then filed a legal claim to the Yellow Ochre Mine at the sites of Sulphur Works and Little Hot Springs Valley. This claim would remain untested until the 1930s.

In 1925 the park began plans for construction of a park road. A major portion was planned to pass through the Supan family claim at Sulphur Works. The manager-secretary of Lassen Volcanic National Park Association, Michael Dittmar, attested to buying right-of-way passage from the Supan family for one dollar. However, no legal record of the transaction was ever filed. This would prove to be a point of contention for many years.

## Sulphur Works through Time

- 1916 The park is established. Eight Supan family members file a claim to Yellow Ochre Mine.
- 1927 Milton starts building a gas station. Lassen's first superintendent halts construction, insisting the claim is void.
- 1931 Park officials file a suit to assess the legitimacy of the Supan claim.
- 1933 Land patent granted for 100 acres of the Supan claim.
- 1941 Adlai Supan, Milton's son, begins a project to turn the area into a tourist destination by building a lodge and gas station.
- 1945- Adlai and his sons build a hot dog stand, 1947 the Scenic View Gift Shop, and a ski tow. Adlai's sister, Ada Herrick, sets up Sulphur Works Inn.
- 1948 The park grants Ada's request to lay water piping under the property, lest she contest the road right-of-way.
- 1949 Superintendent Daniel Tobin sends a request to the now 35 Supan heirs to buy Sulphur Works for \$20,000. Half want to sell, half want to keep the land. All agree the asking price is too low.  
  
*United States v. Ada Herrick, et al.* begins the legal battle for Sulphur Works.
- 1950 The Supans must pay a \$75 fee to continue their operations for the season.
- 1951 The park gains possession of the Supan inholdings at \$31,000. Many family members are incensed by the low sum. Adlai's son, Donald, publishes a plea for public outcry in the Red Bluff Daily News.
- 1952 The Supans are awarded \$48,950 for both Sulphur Works and Little Hot Springs Valley.



Scenic View Gift Shop and hot dog stand ca. 1945



Sulphur Works, park road, and Supan buildings ca. 1949



Adlai Supan fills up at the Sulphur Works Lodge gas station ca. 1950

## Sulphur Works and Us

While the park considered options for the Sulphur Works area such as an information center, concessions, or a ski site; eventually all thirteen of the Supan buildings were torn down. The Supan story is still intimately intertwined with the geological and administrative past of Lassen Volcanic National Park and it is part of what makes Sulphur Works what it is today. Now, it's our turn to discover what makes Sulphur Works such an important and special place.



Sulphur Works present day