

History & Screen Time

What is under the water, and what got filmed on top of it

You are floating on a drowned valley. This is what was there, who lost it, and what Hollywood shot nearby afterward.

Skaggs Springs — the resort beneath the boat

This is the best story of the day and it is directly under you.

In the **fall of 1856** the Skaggs family arrived and claimed a site then called Hot Sulphur Springs. **Elijah Skaggs** was the original pre-emptor; after he died in **March 1861** his brother **Alexander** took over and built it into a resort. A redwood hotel went up in **1864** with an addition the following year. By **1871** two daily stages ran from Healdsburg to the springs at a dollar a passenger.

1877 was the peak: three hundred invalids, tourists and vacationers on a good day through the May-to-October season. Seventeen hotel rooms. Cottages named after Bay Area cities. Three hot springs feeding alkaline baths that reached **130°F**, plus a cold soda-and-iron spring sold as a cure.

Alexander handed the resort to his sons Wilson and George in **1884** and died in Santa Rosa in **1897**. J. P. Mulgrew ran it into 1907, then the Curtis family from **1909 to 1942**, adding refrigeration and enlarging the bathhouse. **The resort closed after the 1942 season**, killed by Depression economics and wartime gas rationing.

The road you drive in on is **Skaggs Springs Road**. It is named for a resort that is underneath you by the time you are on the water.

The dam

The Army Corps of Engineers built Warm Springs Dam: **319 feet high, 3,000 feet long, 30 feet wide at the crest, 30 million cubic yards of earth**. Completed **1982–83**, with the reservoir filling through the late eighties.

It holds **381,000 acre-feet** total against a 245,000 acre-foot water-supply pool, covers more than 2,700 acres, and drains a 130-square-mile watershed. **Seventeen thousand acres went under water**. Roughly **88,000 acres were taken** for the project overall.

The Dry Creek Pomo

Pomo people lived in this valley for **more than 10,000 years**; Wappo people were also present at European contact. The flooding destroyed roughly **65 prehistoric and 45 historic Pomo sites** — one

count puts the total at **122 cultural sites**: house-pits, hunting blinds, quarries, petroglyphs, gathering grounds.

The sharpest specific loss is basketry. The reservoir drowned miles of the sedge and willow beds that Pomo weaving depends on. Among the weavers who lost access were **Elsie Allen, Mabel McKay and Laura Somersal**. Somersal, on the record:

"We used to be able to gather sedge from the Warm Springs area. Because of the dam going in, we can't do it anymore."

The Corps transplanted about **39,000 plants** downstream to try to preserve the resource; success was never established. **The Dry Creek Rancheria received 75 acres of the 88,000 taken**, with ten acres set aside for the transplanted sedge.

It went to the Supreme Court. Twice.

The dam was not built quietly. *Warm Springs Dam Task Force v. Gribble* ran through the federal courts for most of a decade:

- **378 F. Supp. 240** (N.D. Cal. 1974) — district court
- **417 U.S. 1301** (1974) — Supreme Court, in-chambers opinion by Justice Douglas
- **439 U.S. 1392** (1978) — Supreme Court again
- **621 F.2d 1017** (9th Cir. 1980) — Ninth Circuit

The Task Force fought on environmental and cultural-resource grounds, including seismic risk from the nearby fault and the destruction of Pomo sites. They lost. But a project that took from the early 1970s to 1983 to finish took that long substantially because it was in court.

Geyserville and The Geysers

In **April 1847** a bear hunter named **William Bell Elliott** chased a wounded bear into a canyon between Cloverdale and Calistoga and found a steam field. He called it **"the Gate of Hades"** and named the place The Geysers — despite there being no actual geysers there.

Sightseers started arriving by **1851**. Major Ewing opened a canvas hotel in **1854** and twenty visitors registered that first year. James Mead built a proper two-story wooden hotel in **1857–58**; over the years its guests included **Mark Twain, Ulysses S. Grant and Theodore Roosevelt**. It burned in **1937**. **Clark Foss**, "the Knight of the Whip," ran a rival stage line from Healdsburg from **1863** until his death in 1885.

The town was first called Clairville Station before being renamed for the springs. Pears and prunes were the dominant crops until the wine boom of the 1970s replaced them with vineyards.

The Geysers is now the largest geothermal field in the world. John C. Grant drilled the first successful well in **1922** and built a 35-kilowatt plant in **1923** — the first geothermal electricity in the Americas. Cheap oil killed it by 1934. PG&E's Unit 1 came online in **1960**, and by **1987** the field peaked at 21 plants and 2,043 megawatts before the steam reservoir began depleting.

The fix is the good part: **they pump treated wastewater back into the ground.** The Southeast Geysers pipeline (1997) moves nine million gallons a day; the Santa Rosa recharge project (2003) adds eleven million. Santa Rosa's sewage is pumped uphill and turned into electricity. Today: **13 plants, 725 megawatts, 316 steam wells, about 45 square miles, powering roughly 725,000 homes.**

Healdsburg

Named for **Harmon Heald**, who laid the town out around a Spanish-style plaza in the 1850s; incorporated 1867. Before grapes, **hops** were the defining Dry Creek Valley crop — the hop kilns still standing in the valley are the architectural leftovers of that economy.

Screen time

You will be standing in a horror movie. *Scream* (1996) shot in Healdsburg — the **Plaza, City Hall**, the **Center Street** buildings, and the old **police station, now the Oakville Grocery building**. It also used Santa Rosa's Railroad Square, Glen Ellen, Sonoma and Tomales.

Nearby and on your route:

- **So I Married an Axe Murderer** (1993) — Cloverdale Airport.
- **American Graffiti** (1973) — George Lucas shot downtown **Petaluma**: Petaluma Blvd North, the old opera house at 149 Kentucky St, the McNear Building. You drive through it going home.
- **True Crime** (1999) — Eastwood filmed at the **Washoe House**, the 1859 stagecoach bar on Roblar Road.
- **Phenomenon** (1996) — Santa Rosa Junior College and **The Wagon Wheel** bar on Mendocino Avenue. You can drink in the shot.
- **Shadow of a Doubt** (1943) — Hitchcock in Santa Rosa: the Fourth & Wilson train station, the house at 904 McDonald Ave.
- **The Birds** (1963) — Hitchcock again, at Bodega and Bodega Bay: the church, the Potter Schoolhouse, the Taylor Street hill.
- **Peggy Sue Got Married** (1986) — Coppola at Santa Rosa High School and Railroad Square.
- **Mumford** (1999) — Lawrence Kasdan, with Healdsburg among the locations.
- **Cheaper by the Dozen** (2003), **Bandits** (2001), **Bottle Shock** (2008), **Howard the Duck** (1986) — all shot in the county.
- **Salomy Jane** (1914) — Guerneville and Monte Rio. Silent era, and among the earliest features made in Sonoma County.

One caveat on a title you may see repeated elsewhere: *For What It's Worth*, reported by Sonoma Magazine as shooting in Geyserville with James Franco and Sharon Stone. Multiple films share that title and the exact release could not be pinned down — treat it as reported rather than confirmed.

Sources

- [Hannah Clayborn — Skaggs Springs history](#)
- [Wikipedia — Lake Sonoma](#)
- [Dry Creek Rancheria — Dry Creek Before the Flood](#)
- [Friends of Lake Sonoma — history](#)
- [Warm Springs Dam Task Force v. Gribble, 417 U.S. 1301](#)
- [Permit Sonoma — Geyserville history](#)
- [The Geysers — history](#)
- [The Geysers by the Numbers 2026](#)
- [Bohemian — Where Was It Filmed](#)
- [Wikipedia — film locations in Sonoma County](#)