

**Summary**

"Save Kelseyville" claim that the town name was arbitrarily assigned by the USPS in 1882 when they renamed the "Uncle Sam" post office.

But the name "Kelseyville" had been used since at least 1865. And the "Town of Kelseyville" was established in 1871 by a Lake County judge, and was used in the 1880 census.

Most historians agree that Kelsey Creek, and Kelseyville are named after Andy Kelsey.

However, "Save Kelseyville" speculates that Kelseyville is named after some later, benign Kelsey.

But the only alternative Kelsey candidates arrived in the area in 1861. As the town formed out of scattered ranches William Kelsay reportedly lobbied for his distant cousin Andy. Nor is "The Widow Kelsey" a plausible honoree.

Suggestions that Kelsey Creek was named after an early trapper "George Kelsey" appear unfounded: Fur trapper George Wyman, who lived near Sutter Fort, married Andy's sister America Kelsey. But there is no evidence that he, and little evidence that any other group of trappers, were in the Lake County area before Andy Kelsey.

"Kelseyville" is, and always has been, named after the evil Andy Kelsey.

**Kelseyville Names**

There are of course numerous Native names for the Big Valley area.

In his appeal for the Mexican land grant, Salvador Vallejo called the ranchero "Lup Yomi" ("Rock Village") and Kelsey Creek "Rio Lup Yomi", though it is not clear if that name was used contemporaneously.

American Pioneers and settlers called the area The Lake, Mister Kelsey's, Kelsey's House, Kelsey Creek and The Town of Kelsey. In legal documents it was usually Kelsey Creek Township or Kelsey. The post office was created as "Uncle Sam" in 1858. That was not used as the town name, although it did appear on maps.

Most historians agree that "Kelseyville" was named after Andrew Kelsey.

But "Save The Name" now claim that the town is not named after the evil Andy, but some later, presumably honorable, town founder. In a letter to the Record Bee, Save Kelseyville secretary Marilyn Holdenried says "The name Kelseyville is a name that was assigned to us in 1882 by the US Post Office."

"Kelsey Creek" (the stream) appears in government records as early as 1863.

Extensive research shows that the name "Kelseyville" was first used in 1865, when there were only two families of Kelseys or Kelsays in the area: William Kelsay and "The Widow Kelsey". William Kelsay lobbied for naming the emerging town after his distant cousin.

Holdenried also says that "In 1882, this area of Kelseyville was not a legal district". But the "Town of

Kelseyville" was established as an assessors district by a Lake County judge, on May 6, 1871.

The specific attribution of the town name to Andy Kelsey first appears in 1873. By that time the name "Kelseyville" was in almost universal local use.

In census records of 1860 the whole of the Lake (then in Napa county) was called "Clear Lake Township": In 1870 it was "Kelsey Creek Township" and by 1880 it was "Kelseyville".

Thus the change of the name of the Post Office from Uncle Sam to Kelseyville, was not the first stamp of official approval, but the belated recognition that local and official usage had changed.

A detailed rebuttal of the "Save Kelseyville" claims is in separate documents, <https://citizensforhealing.org/stnk-knames.php> and in [Rebuttal of Marilyn Holdenried letter to the Record Bee](#).

In Jan 2025 Lake County supervisor Helen Owens suggested that Kelsey Creek was named after an early trapper in Lake County, George Kelsey -- in the 1830's (even before Vallejo).

I found two candidates concerning "George", "Kelsey", "Trapper" and "Lake County":

- There was a [George Kelsey](#), apparently the deceased husband of the "Widow Kelsey" Permelia, but he died in Missouri, in 1859 - before the Kelseys came to California.
- Another candidate is [George Francis Wyman](#), who married America Kelsey, Andy Kelsey's sister: "When George first met America, he was a fur trapper. It was the next day after her father had died of smallpox [near Sutter's Fort]. He and his friend, Joseph Buzzell, had camped near the cabin where the Kelseys lived. They had ventured into California's interior, after hearing of the vast trapping opportunities, from Jedediah Smith." None of them are reported as having come to Lake County.

Yet another possibility is that Supervisor Owens' comments refer to a different Kelsey Creek. There IS a Kelsey Creek in Josephine County, Oregon (where America went to live with her blinded mother, Susan Cozzart), and another in Siskiyou County, CA. But the association with George Wyman and "Kelsey Creek" is muddy.

## Trappers in Lake County

A related question is whether there were many trappers in Lake County. Palmer (p47) speculates that the Russians may have reached Clear Lake:

In 1811 the Russo- American Fur Company established a post at Bodega, and a few years later at Fort Ross, in Sonoma County. They extended their fur hunting operations all along the coast and up the streams leading therefrom, " hunting out " the entire section very closely indeed. As the game became scarce near the coast they extended their incursions inland, and in all probability they found their way into the Clear Lake Valley. Following up Russian River they would come to the rancheria of the Sanel Indians, who, it will be remembered, are a sort of second cousin to the Hoolanapos on the west side of the lake. It would naturally follow that they would hear of the lake and pay it a visit, and, when once there, would prosecute their hunting operations in it. No direct evidences are left of their visits to these parts ...

Palmer (p46) identifies a group of hunters who built a cabin in Lake County ...

It is authentically stated that in a very early day there was a party of hunters who spent the winter in the valley near Lower Lake. They were on their way from Oregon, and instead of keeping down the Sacramento River, the usually traveled route, they had started across the mountains, heading for the old Russian settlements at Bodega and Fort Ross. The Russians had left in 1841 ...

But this is after Vallejo came to Lake County in about 1840:

Just when Salvador Vallejo took formal possession of the valley is not now known, but Augustine, chief of the Hoolanapo Indians, informs us that it was about ten years before the killing of Stone and Kelsey, which would, at least take us back to 1840.

In "Mountains and Pioneers of Lake County" Henry Mauldin Notes:

Caleb Greenwood, a trapper (whether for the Hudson Bay outfit or the Missouri fur traders, or just on his own, no one knows, in company with a couple of others, was supposed to have spent a winter around 1826 at the lower end of Clear Lake. Ewing Young and his party came by the lake in 1831.

Biographies of Greenwood do not mention such an excursion, as he was more active in the Sierras (though he lived in Lake County at the end of his life).

Of Young, Mauldin says (Lake County in the Beginning - probably also in the Mauldin files)

In 1831 Ewing Young, a great trapper and hunter, came into southern California with thirty six men. Trapping, he worked his way north and in January 1833 came from the Sacramento Valley, along the south and west shore of Clear Lake to pass on up the coast.

and continues:

During the summer of 1833 John Works party of twenty seven white men, six indians and many pack horses came over the hills from Potter Valley and camped near the upper end of Clear Lake for a day. He represented Hudson's Bay Fur Company, looking for beaver, but none were found. His comment being that the territory was well suited to beaver, but the Indians, numbering so many, probably kept them down. Then the camp was set up for two days at Kelseyville. Many deer and bear were seen, altho great numbers of tracks were in evidence no elk were found. This group of men went through the lower end of the county on their way to the Sacramento.

In short: trapping in at least the main basin of Clear Lake was poor, there was no George Kelsey, and there were not enough trappers in the area to attribute the creek name of Kelsey Creek to the hypothetical George.

Of course, the Natives Americans in the area called Kelsey Creek "Hitch bidame", and Vallejo called it Rio de LupYomi.