

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Letter From Sutter: 'I Can Pay in Pure Gold'

In the collection of original letters and manuscripts owned by Thomas W. Norris of Carmel, is one from Captain John A. Sutter to Mr. J.F. Romie at Monterey, California. The latter is dated: "New Helvetia, May 12, 1848." It was upon Sutter's land that the first gold in California was discovered and it is for him that Sutter's Fort in Sacramento is named. In 1842 Governor Micheltorena appointed Sutter "commandante militar" translatable as "captain"; and in 1853 the legislature made him a major general.

Mr. Romie, to whom Sutter wrote the letter, was the father of Mrs. Romie Jacks, and the grandfather of Miss Margaret Jacks, who now makes her home in Palo Alto, but frequently visits her home here, the old Castro Adobe, back of the Del Monte golf course. She is a director of the Monterey History and Art Association, vice president of the Monterey Foundation and owner of the Old Pacific building and Memory Garden.

The letter follows, as translated from the German:

New Helvetia, May 12, '48

Mr. J.F. Romie,
Monterey, California.

Dear Sir:

With every launch I have awaited news from you; also the suit which you promised to send to me; also the coat which you were to make for me at once, I never received. Very likely you doubted my ability to make payment. On this account you need have no further fear, because we now have GOLD enough on the Sacramento, and as soon as you can send me the clothes, you can send me the bill which should be paid in pure gold.

One or more descriptions of the mineral discovered you will find in the public press. It is astounding what discoveries are being made every day. We have the richest placer that was ever heard of. From what we can judge now, it extends all over the area of over 100 miles long, and 70 to 80 miles wide. Silver is also present. Major Reeding and I have discovered the first silver mine and recently many others were found. There is plenty of quick silver and iron ore containing 85% of

iron in inexhaustible quantities – and everything close to a beautiful stream suitable for water power.

At first men were earning \$4 to \$5 per day. Then it increased to \$10 to \$16 and now it is much more than that. Several are finding very much. In a single wash day of dirt a man found \$60, and a few days ago a boy of 15 years earned \$70 in one day.

A number of Mormons cleared \$600 to \$1,000 in six to seven weeks. Business is already very active. The storekeepers often take in 20 to 30 ounces in one day.

Our new town of Suttersville is now definitely assured to be the second city in California to San Francisco in a short time. This year a great deal of building will take place. Wouldn't you like to build on your lots?

Also in the mountains near my saw mill there is a town. Already the people are buying lumber there and immediately pay for it in gold, which saves me the trouble of shipping it to San Francisco.

We also have a market here for our flour and all other products. You will soon read an article about this in the *Californian*. Do me the favor Mr. Romie, and don't let me wait long, as I need the ordered clothes very much. In five months I expect my family, which is coming over the Rocky Mountains, together with some relatives and friends, which will bring a great change in New Helvetia

With friendly greeting to you and family,

J. A. SUTTER

P.S. Could you send me a box of California or "abolony" shells, or the big sea shells with the beautiful rainbow colors? You would be doing me a big favor; and I will very gratefully pay you whatever they cost. The fresh ones are the best. The older ones have usually lost a great deal of their brilliant colors.

P.S. (Et Supra) Here's a proof of the business activity we have here. This evening some Mormons bought mules for the sum of \$800 and paid in gold. A boy same with them who had a point of the purest gold which he had dug out in a few weeks.