

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Formerly Hildreth's Diggins

Our trip to the Mother Lode, the ghost towns of '49, was a pleasure from start to finish. Leaving the beauty of the Peninsula to travel through the wild flowers all the way to Sonora was a delight.

San Juan was, of course, our first historical landmark and first state monument, and was the only one for three days at which we did not linger. If we were writing a motorlog we would certainly compliment the highways and the very efficient way in which they are marked for the motorists' convenience.

Our real tour of inspection began when we turned from the main highway to cross the covered bridge and visit Knight's Ferry. The town was founded on the Stanislaus River by William Knight, a physician, in 1849. Here the first ferry to be established on the Sonora road from Stockton to the southern mines.

The original of the old-fashioned covered bridge was said to have been designed by Ulysses S. Grant while on a visit to his brother-in-law, Lewis Dent. This bridge was carried away in the flood of 1862, and the present one put together with locust pine, was built a few years later. It now belongs to the county and since 1884 has not been a toll bridge. Two historical markers have been placed there, one by the Daughters of the American Revolution and one by the Native Sons of the Golden West, in cooperation with the Centennial Commission.

As we hurried through Jamestown we were pleased to note that the State Highway Commission had left the narrow winding main street as it has been enjoyed for these many years, and are building the highspeed road a block away.

We spent the night in Sonora – the home of the famous Bonanza mine from which, within a week, in 1870, 990 pounds of gold, worth over \$300,000 was removed; then on up further into the hills of Tuolumne County to Columbia, originally called Hildreth's Diggins, then for a time, American Camp.

It is now part of the California State Park system, having been made so on July 15, 1945, when Governor Earl Warren signed the bill to this effect at a great celebration in the old town, made capital of the state for one day. It is considered the best preserved mining town of the Mother Lode. In 1850 one of the residents

is said to have dug up a nugget in his back yard, and started the town on its way to fame as the "Second City of California."

The "Stage Drivers Retreat" is now a museum with many interesting relics, including the old time bar and a piano brought around the Horn – but it is the smaller exhibits that create most interest.

Because the Chinese played such an important part in California's history, there is a great deal in this museum to honor them. Mr. Hubert McNoble, a former assistant curator at the state-owned buildings in Monterey, is now an assistant at Columbia.

The Masonic Temple has been completely restored and other old time brick buildings up and down the main street will be restored by the state as fast as funds are available.

The old No. 1 firehouse at Columbia contains two old fire engines. It is claimed that Engine No. 1 in Boston in 1850, is the oldest in the United States and still in active service. It was shipped around the horn to San Francisco in 1859, consigned to the king of the Sandwich Islands.

It was held in San Francisco so long that the shippers became alarmed and when it was learned that Columbia needed a fire engine, arrangements were made for its purchase – so the plaque placed in the firehouse reads. No. 2 engine was bought in San Francisco in 1862 because it was too heavy to handle in that city of hills. It took 20 men to operate Engine No. 1 and 30 for Engine 2. The original fire hose is of riveted buffalo hide.

The College of the Pacific purchased the Fallon Hotel and theater and expect to restore it to its original "grandeur." Here the noted Pacific Little Theater Company will stage thrilling melodramas when plans are completed.

The decorative iron balconies, the tall iron doors and shutters are still intact on the many brick buildings. It is told that once Columbia had two theaters, 17 dry goods stores, four hotels, three drug stores and twice as many laundries. It had a printing shop, a brewery, a daguerreotype studio and a chain store. Now it has two exceptionally good candy kitchens, each of which ships candy famous all over the United States. It is good. We know. We ought some.

We had a visit with Otheto Weston, a resident of Columbia, who is well known on the Peninsula. She

informed us that she will spend the summer months at Pinecrest on Lake Strawberry. Mrs. Weston is the author of "Mother Lode Album" which is made attractive with her many photographs of scenes in towns and places she writes about.

It was Mrs. Mary Greene's wish that she complete her ambition to visit every state park in California, that was the inspiration for this travel log, which we will continue tomorrow.