

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 15, 1951

J. P. Morgan and Black Bart

When George Angel James Carson and their associates went journeying up to Monterey to fine out the truth about the gold rumors in 1848, two of the members of the company were John and Daniel Murphy. When their companions stopped along the way, the Murphy brothers went on.

There is a story that they hired Indians to work their diggings and that at the end of 1848 these laborers had washed out the unbelievable sum of a million and a half dollars for Daniel and John.

The town that they founded and which bears their name, was one of the most charming communities which we visited on our tour of the Mother Lode. Here one notices in particular the ancient and beautiful trees and the peacefulness of the entire place.

In the old hotel—The Mitchler—the old guest register is still there, showing the signatures of Senator George Hearst, Henry Ward Beecher, John Hayes Hammond, J. Pierpont Morgan (who asked for a parlor), Bishop Kip of the Episcopal Church, and Charles Bolton (Black Bart).

It was surprising and very noticeable in all the old mining towns we visited to always come upon an Odd Fellow's Hall and a Wells-Fargo Express Office with its iron doors and shutters and always well built.

San Andreas was interesting because of its many old balconied buildings and for the reason that the trail of Black Bart was held here. Leaving the county seat of Calaveras County we motored on past the Pioneer Cemetery and off the road a bit to see the stately stone Wheat Mansion, set back from the road and deeply shaded by old trees. The house was once the first court house of the county in 1850. It was a "ready to set up" building imported from China and built of fine-grained aromatic Oriental wood.

When we went through Mokelumne Hill we thought of the late Mrs. Hattie Gragg; that city had been her birthplace on October 9, 1857. When she was six months old she was brought to Monterey by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bradley Sargent.

Ninety-four years ago the town was one of the largest and liveliest among the "diggin's" It was named for the

Mokelko Indian tribe who lived near the river which bears their name.

It is said of the place that a man was killed every weekend for a period of seventeen weeks—but it has no resemblance to that period of history new. The oldest Congregational church in California was built in Mokelumne Hill in 1851.

At one time there was a population of over 1,000 Chinese here and evidence of their presence is still preserved in the many Chinese "Trees of Heaven" here and elsewhere in the Mother Lode. They very much resemble a walnut tree and have a disagreeable odor.

We visited Old Shasta, now a state monument where we were greeted by Henry Collins, formerly curator of the Stevenson House at Monterey. We paused to look over the historic spots in Jackson, Grass Valley, Nevada City, and didn't miss a single historic marker along the way. These large markers with their informative bronze tablets which have been placed from one border of California to the other—north and south and east and west—by California Centennial Commission and community cooperation, are certainly one of the most worth-while activities which came out of the Centennial years.

Coloma was a sad sight. Winter storms had carried away much of the road and a great deal of the many improvements put there by the State Parks Commission in preparation for the Centennial celebration there in 1949. But nevertheless one felt the importance historically of being where gold was actually discovered first in California.

Other Mother Lode towns may claim their first this or that, but Coloma's historic significance is unequalled as the spot where James Wilson Marshall picked grains of gold in the tail race of Captain Sutter's mill. Marshall lies buried on the hill where his historic bronze statue stands. The state has reconstructed two buildings at Coloma and there are several other buildings still standing, all of which were built in early 1850's.