

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Indians on the Warpath

A journey from Santa Cruz to Virginia City, Nevada, in 1862 was a perilous, as well as an intensely interesting one. The late Mrs. Thomas Morgan describes such a journey in her "Reminiscences" written in 1922, while she was a resident of Carmel.

The only manner of travel at that time was by stage over the mountains to San Francisco, thence by boat to Sacramento and on more stages over the Sierra Nevada mountains to Virginia City. Mrs. Morgan overcame the monotony of the long journey by becoming quite content in observing things and conditions as she traveled.

Through the Big Trees the stage went with each and every passenger, some taking the journey for the first time, amazed at the beauty and enormous size of the trees. From Felton, the stage ascended and crossed the divide of the Santa Cruz mountains into the next valley. There was a toll-house at the top of the mountains, where they stopped long enough to pay the toll and to water the horses. Buck-Skin-Lawrence was the name of the toll-house keeper. For years each and every person or vehicle paid for passage over this mountain road.

Upon Mrs. Morgan's arrival in San Francisco she took passage on the river steamer "Yosemite" up the bay and river to Sacramento. From there she took the stage north and east to Hangtown, now Placerville, and one over the Sierra Nevadas.

She wrote in her account of this journey, that the trip might have seemed much longer and more trying, if it had not been relieved in several ways by the congenial passengers. They sang songs, told stories and comforted each other to allay nervousness as the stage would round dangerous places on the high precipitous mountainsides.

The passengers were also given a bit of a thrill, because the Indians were on the warpath, much to the consternation of all. It must be explained that these Indian wars were among the tribes and partook of the nature of the later day tong wars among the Chinese, which were a common occurrence in the early 1900s.

The Piute and Washoes were in dispute at the time of Mrs. Morgan's journey. Their scouts and outposts were seen sending signals and often war whoops and Indian

yells were heard. The yell or call was far from being shrill, she recalled, but could be heard for a very long distance. A very deep breath was taken by the Indian, who then called in a medium pitched tone, at the same time patting or alternately covering and uncovering his mouth in quite rapid manner as he calls. There were certain variations in the call to express meaning, Mrs. Morgan explained.

At night during the journey, signal fires were seen on the mountain tops or places with a clear view of distances as the travelers approached Nevada.

Mrs. Morgan arrived in Virginia City at the height of the silver mining era and reported that excitement was rampant. Close where she lived there was a big fire which threatened to spread over a great area of the town.

A guard was standing close by the young visitor as she watched the fire. His order was not to allow a single wagon to drive over the hose which crossed the road. A six-horse wagon from a prominent mine was driven up and the driver ordered not to cross. "Don't cross that hose, or I will shoot", commanded the guard. The driver of the team did not obey and a shot rang out. The driver fell forward and rolled down into a heap in the road with a bullet through his heart, remembers Mrs. Morgan.

This was the twenty-sixth man who had gone to the little cemetery, close by, in a very short period, all the deaths happening in just such sudden fashion, namely "They died with their boots on."

Mark Twain was a printer in Virginia City during Mrs. Morgan's stay there, known by his true name, Samuel Clemens.

She remembered that he sat at a table close to her at breakfast one morning. "Waiter, please bring me a chair." His request complied with the waiter asked him why he wanted an extra chair "It's so weak, it need to rest" was his reply. Needless to say, according to Mrs. Morgan, he promptly received an extra cup of strong coffee that morning in the early 1860s.

Mrs. Morgan had the opportunity of going down in the Gould and Curry mine during her visit in Nevada. She relates in her story of meeting Mackey, James Fair and Adams of the Adams Express company, during the days when they were amassing their fortunes.