

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Black Bart, Bard**

"About three o'clock p.m. July 25th, 1879, the down town stage from Quincy, Plumas County to Oroville, Butte County, was stopped by one masked man, and from Wells Fargo & Co.'s box was taken, \$379 coin, one diamond ring said to have been worth \$200, and one silver-watch valued at \$25."

The above statement is copied from a reproduction of the original circular issued by the Book Club of California as a keepsake for its members under the heading, "Attention Pioneers!" The circular was "for the use of officers and discreet persons only." "Black Bart, The PO8" was noted stage robber referred to in the confidential circular.

It is most appropriate in Monterey that a part of the romantic past of Black Bart should be recalled while The Troopers of the Gold Coast are playing "Black Bart" at California's First Theatre each week end.

The original of the circular is in the collection of Wells Fargo History Room, in San Francisco. Accompanying the reproduction of the original circular is a text by Joseph Henry Jackson, noted author and book reviewer.

The circular is headed "Arrest Stage Robber, "in heavy black type. Then follows details of three stage robberies, one August 3, 1877 between Fort Ross, and the Russian River, the second on the 25TH and the third on July 30th, 1878 between La Pore and Oroville. Two of Black Bart's poems are quoted, one appearing as a facsimile.

Mr. Jackson relates that at various times in the latter 1870s, Wells Fargo's chief of detectives, J.B. Hume, issued reward posters on Black Bart, California's greatest stage-robber. Some were for public exhibition, others for private information of Wells Fargo's agents.

Bart's first poem was left in the empty treasure-chest after the Fort Ross stage had been held up on August 3, 1877. The poster reproduces it in type, complete with lovely epithet, "fine haired," often misquoted "fair haired."

It is this poster and the poems that makes for confusion historically as to just how many poems Black Bart wrote in his eight years of successful holdups.

Joseph Henry Jackson thinks that Bart wrote just the two shown on the 1878 poster. A check of dates has shown that all other verses ascribed to him were composed either by reporters of the time, eager to add more color to their stories, or by later jokers as deliberate hoaxes. Chief of the latter, our informant tells us, was one written in 1930s, printed in a fine-press broadside of "Black Bart Poetry," and since accepted by many as authentic Bartiana. It ends— "So blame me not for what I've done; I don't deserve your curses. And if for any cause I'm hung, Let it be for my verses!"

It is known that Bart had never killed anyone in his life, and indeed, for all his twenty-eight stage holdups, never even fired a shot, so it was most unlikely that "For any cause...he'd be hung."