

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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How Mark Twain Lost A Goldmine

Mark Twain once missed a gold mine of \$20,000 because he refused to carry one more pail of water for his partner, Steve Gillis. The sad happening occurred many years ago and was retold in the 40-years-ago items in the "Pages of the Past" in the Territorial Enterprise of Virginia City, Nev.

Twain, then known by his real name of Samuel Clemens, began his early writing while a member of the editorial staff in this Comstock Lode community. He had come west to join his brother who had been appointed territorial secretary and was living in Carson City.

On with the story of Twain's loss which happened later in the Mother Lode country of California. With Steve Gillis, a printer of whom he was very fond, Twain went into Calaveras County to a cabin on Jackass Hill, where Steve's brother, Jim, a loveable, picturesque character (the "Truthful James" of Bret Hart) owned mining claims. Mark decided to spend his vacation in pocket mining and soon added that science to his store of knowledge. It was a halcyon, happy three months that he lingered there. One day with Jim Gillis he was following the spots of gold that led to a pocket somewhere up the hill when, a chill, dreary rain set in. Jim was washing and Clemens was carrying water....

The "color" became better and better as they ascended, and Gillis, possessed with the mining passion, would have gone on regardless of the rain. Clemens, however, protested and declared that each pail of water was his last.

Gillis had just taken out a pan of earth, so the story goes.

"Bring me one more pail of water, Sam," he pleaded.

"I won't do it, Jim! Not one drop! Not if I knew there was a million dollars in that pan."

They left the pan standing there and went over to Angel's Camp, which was nearer than their own cabin. The rain kept on and they sat around the grocery and bar room smoking and telling stories to pass the time.

Meanwhile the rain had washed away the top of the pan of earth left standing on the slope of Jackass Hill and exposed a handful of nuggets – pure gold.

Two strangers had come along and observing it, sat down to wait until the 30 days claim notice posted by Jim Gillis should expire. They did not mind the rain – not with that much gold in sight – and the minute the 30 days were up they followed the lead a few pans further and took out \$20,000 in all. It was a gold pocket. Twain missed it by one pail of water!

While reading through old issues of The Herald to gather material for the Olden Times report, we came across a letter to the editor written by the late Francis McComas, one of the country's most famous artists. For those new residents who would be interested in knowing how Bonifacio Street got its name, we are repeating that letter today in the Peninsula Diary.

The letter is dated Jan. 6, 1923. The editor added this comment: "Since the complete removal of the old 'Sherman Rose House' and the beginning of preparations for the erection of a new bank building on a portion of the site, together with plans for a new street to connect Alvarado with Tyler, there has been no little conjecture and many suggestions as to the proper name for that thoroughfare. One of the best to come to The Herald is that from Francis McComas."

"In the naming of the proposed street through the Sherman Rose property there is an opportunity to repair slightly the wrong done when the charming house was removed. That removal was possibly the biggest mistake Monterey has permitted yet, the house being the finest asset Alvarado Street had – along with the Custom House and a few remaining adobes on an otherwise hideously ugly thoroughfare. To my mind every adobe removed from Alvarado Street sets it back, both in esthetic as well as in a business sense, just so much more. I have seen them go one after another to be replaced by buildings architecturally impossible and ugly.

"Perhaps the suggestion to name the new thoroughfare "Bank Street" is a joke. I have a fear it is not, and suggest that instead of the constant destroying of tradition of Monterey, a little might be retained by naming the street "Bonifacio Place" after the sweet lady who did so much to put our town on the map. Her house was torn down; maybe we can preserve her memory. Many of us would like that for the sake of sentiment. For those who lack it, then let it be for business for things commercial are never hurt by things delightful."