

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Pictorial Humor Of the Gold Rush

Four more of the California Book Club's "Pictorial Humor of the Gold Rush" have arrived for the entertainment of the membership. There are to be twelve folders in all, each containing a reproduction of a humorous drawing of the period. The series edited by Carl I. Wheat, with comments by various authorities, is being designed and printed by the Grabhorn Press of San Francisco. The originals of the illustrations accompanying the latest group are in the collection of the California Historical Society, the California State Library, and Edwin Grabhorn.

"Album Californiano" is an expose of a few of the hoaxes foisted, with tongue in cheek, upon a credulous and absorbant public, according to Mrs. Edna Martin Parratt, director of the Historical Society's Museum on McAllister Street in San Francisco. "Women and Gold Nuggets" is the title of No. 6 in the series. It contains a reproduction of two original drawings or cartoons with French titles, drawn by Amedee de Noe commonly known as "Cham," about 1848.

Number 7 in the pictorial humor series is "Gambling in the Mines." David Magee wrote in his commentary upon the drawing which illustrates this number, "The unknown artist has given us a delightful glimpse of the types and nationalities that gathered around the gaming table – the Mexican in his serape, the burly, bearded miner, the top-hatted dandy at the bank, the drunken youth who may yet lose the simper and turn trigger-happy. It is a composite picture-a-mood, a minor moment in a major event, and no less charming for what it leaves to the imagination."

"The Feast of Gold," Number 8, illustrates fashions in entertainment; showing how slowly these fashions have changed. Oscar Lewis has written the commentary for the facsimile of a piece of sheet music, published in London at the time of California's Gold Rush. The "new comic song" entitled "California: or 'The Feast of Gold,'" was written by Henry Valentine, and sung by Messrs. Carrol, Warde, Martin, and Mills, "with Thunders of Applause."

Typical, and the most entertaining of hoaxes foisted upon the public during the Gold Rush days, is "Four Months Among the Gold-finders of California," written

by J. Tyrwhitt Brooks in 1849, but actually compiled from various sources and with a keen imagination – at the London desk of young Henry Vizatelly, with the assistance of David Bogue, in less than a fortnight's time. Mrs. Parratt found this information in "Secrets of Our National Literature, London, 1908."

Many examples of the mid-century buffoonery have survived and may be found in many libraries and some among the private collections of California. From one of the rarest of the latter, the Book Club chose a colored drawing of three men – typical miners in action and dress, entitled "Tipos Californianos" and signed by Augusto Ferran.

We find that it was about 1849 or 1850 that there appeared from the "Litografia" of Luis Marquier Compania of Havana the "Album Californiano; Coleccion de Tipos Observados y Dibujados por los Sres. Ferran y Baturone" ... as is common in Hispanic America; this album was published by subscription in its entirety – or in part. The entire album contained a total of what was probably sixteen numbered plates. The most complete set is known to be in the possession of the New York Historical Society. The California Historical Society owns numbers 1 to 8, 10 and 12. Of these plates which were included in what must have been the final "entrega," only No. 14 has been found. The first 12 have been reproduced in Joseph Henry Jackson's "Gold Rush Album."

These prints are contemporary and delightful illustrations of the characteristic California miner, thinks Mrs. Parratt, as seen through the eyes of Jose Baturone and Augusto Ferran, two young Cuban artists, each of whom apparently contributed eight of the drawings. Ten of the known scenes might have been made in any California town of the period; three, quite obviously, reflect Cuban locale. The success of the series is evidenced by the presence in New York Historical Society, reported by R.W.G. Vail in his "Gold Fever," of one of an apparent series of plagiaristic prints issued in Kingston, Jamaica, under the oddly-translated title of "Californias' Type.'

The Monterey Library is a member of the Book Club of California and the numbers from the Pictorial Humor of the Gold Rush may be seen there.