

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Sutter's Fort**

During our recent tour of the Mother Lode we visited Sutter's Fort, and the Indian Museum in Sacramento, and found them both greatly improved since our last visit there a number of years ago. We were hospitably greeted by Carroll D. Hall, the curator of this State Historical Monument; Jack Dyson, curator of the Indian Museum, formerly at the San Juan Bautista monument; and Henry Collins, who was in charge of the Stevenson House when it was opened as a house museum.

The fort was founded in 1839 by a Swiss, Johann (John) Augustus Sutter. Of his original fort there remains the two-story central building with adobe walls, and oak floor joists. The fort's outer walls and rooms, which had disappeared by the 1860's, were reconstructed by the State after it acquired the property in 1890.

Recorded history of the fort tells us that the property passed out of Sutter's hands shortly after the discovery of gold, and the subdivided property changed hands several times during the intervening years. By the late 50's not much was left of the old fort except the present central building. In the 1880's it presented a forlorn appearance until 1888 when Sacramento Parlor No. 3 and Sunset Parlor No. 26, Native Sons of the Golden West, interested the Grand Parlor in a project to save the famous landmark. The sum of \$20,000 was raised to purchase the building in 1890. The trustees donated it to the State, and the Legislature agreed to accept, reconstruct and maintain the fort. A sum of money was voted for this purpose.

Within a year the actual reconstruction began. Carroll Hall tells a story in his booklet on "Sutter's Fort" that about that time several workmen panned some of the dirt near the east gate and recovered a quantity of gold dust, which had been dropped by miners or swept from gambling rooms and stores, on the premises. Doubtless this was some of the first gold panned after Marshall's discovery. One of the "Miners" (workmen) had a charm or medal made from the gold he found and it may be seen today in a case in the museum gallery.

Another interesting story told by Mr. Hall is in answer to the tourists who ask if the fort today is as it was originally. His answer is that it occupies the same site, and broadly speaking, gives a good idea of the layout of

the original fort. There is a story that the corners of the fort, which had disappeared, were relocated in 1872 when an enterprising attorney had a case in which it was necessary to find the southwest angle. He knew that Ephraim Fairchild had formerly operated a blacksmith shop on the corner of the fort and had kept his coal there. By digging until he came to coal dust, the attorney was able to find the outer angle of the fort and the other line was established by adding to the thickness of the wall.

Formerly a slough ran along the north side. This site is now occupied by two little lakes and a rustic bridge. Lawns, trees and shrubs beautify the grounds, and when we were there a handsome wisteria vine was in bloom over the entrance gates, a double row of standard roses were in bud, and beneath them a border of pansies and daffodils added a gay expanse of color.

The Native Daughters of the Golden West have contributed many of the shrubs and trees and a great deal of interest toward the historical exhibits which attract the tourist to Sacramento.

Approximately 8,000 objects are listed in the Museum records, but not all of them are exhibited at one time. The Museum strives to reflect the California period from 1839, when Sutter came, to 1869, when the "Gold Spike" completed the transcontinental railroad; and that "The buildings, interior and exterior, be handled in such manner as will best retain and impart the romantic atmosphere of the "Days of Forty-nine." Loans are occasionally accepted, but outright gifts are preferred and they must carry no restrictions.

Generally speaking the rooms around the fort were 17 feet wide and of various lengths. They were used as living quarters, stores, shops, etc. Sutter's bedroom, kitchen and office, as reproduced, will be found just west of the main gate. A bronze marker put up by E. Clampus Vitus members in 1926, says that Marshall here disclosed to Sutter on January 28, 1848, his discovery of gold four days before. But this historic incident may have taken place in the central building, where Sutter had quarters at least part of the time he lived at the fort.

(To Be Continued)