

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Bonanza Days Revived**

Virginia City in Nevada is the last of the gold rush and early western communities to recognize its importance historically, and begin to preserve what is left of its fading souvenirs of heroic yesterdays.

Following the successful precedents set by such heroic communities in the land as Williamsburg, Va., Central City, Colo., and Columbia, in the Mother Lode, the last of these a project of the California Division of beaches and Parks, Virginia City is undertaking a drive among friends of the Old West for \$1,000,000 with which to restore its fading past.

Announcement of the plans has been made by Clinton Andreasen, chairman of the restoration committee, which will operate within the framework already provided by the Virginia City Foundation Trust, a nonprofit public trust instituted four years ago by Helen Mayre Thomas, a descendant of Virginia City's noted Mayre family of Bonanza times.

The interested citizens are now planning, among other activities, to spotlight the Comstock and arouse interest in the preservation of its historic monuments with a centennial celebration in 1959 when 100 years will have elapsed since the first substantial discovery of precious metals in the Gold Canyon below what is now Gold Hill.

The committee plans as their first project the "restoration of the old Fourth Ward school, now falling into decay; the Masonic Hall; the town's churches; Miners Union Hall and other structures either owned by the county or by organizations. Later they will undertake to work out terms with private property owners under which their properties may eventually revert to the trust."

The Virginia City Enterprise, the newspaper upon which Mark Twain began his career, reports that the complementary projects under consideration by the trustees are the restoration of the wooden sidewalks everywhere on C Street where they have been replaced by concrete, a reversion to gas illumination in the town's business section to recreate the atmosphere of boom times and the possible elimination, with the cooperation of the utilities concerned, of the telephone and power lines and poles on C Street.

The committee chairman also reports: "Several times a year film companies look over Virginia City with an eye to shooting westerns here, but they are always discouraged by the telephone poles." We, here in Monterey, have the same problem on the Custom House Reservation and the entrance to the Old Wharf. The poles, wires and other hideous equipment always interfere with an otherwise beautiful picture.

While we are writing of Virginia City it is appropriate that we should announce the birth of a new book: "Roughing It in California" by Mark Twain, as published by the L-D Allen Press of Kentfield, Calif.

In July, 1861, Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) and his brother, Orion, left St. Joseph, Mo., on a delightful 19-day stage journey to Carson City, Nev., where Orion assumed his duties as the new territorial secretary.

For Sam this was the start of approximately six years of vagabonding adventures in the far West and the Hawaiian Islands. These experiences supplied the material for "Roughing It" which first appeared in 1872; and the present text embraces, affectionately, all the chapters devoted to California.

In "Roughing It" Twain describes his exciting attempt to acquire timber lands on the shores of Lake Tahoe; his weird and amusing adventures at Mono Lake; his reaction to the varied California countryside and scenery; his memorable experiences in San Francisco as a reporter and "social butterfly"; his scrapes while mining in the Tuolumne and Angel Camp hills; and finally, his nerve-wracking and side-splitting first lecture in San Francisco.

His first attempt at writing appeared in the Virginia City "Territorial Enterprise," and they soon hired him as a reporter at \$25 a week. "Mark Twain" was first signed to an Enterprise article on Feb. 2, 1863; from that date on, it was attached to all of Clemens' work.

In May 1864 Twain arrived in San Francisco. He accepted a position as reporter on the "Morning Call," and became associated with Bret Harte, Charles Warren Stoddard (who is buried in the Monterey Catholic cemetery), and other literary figures.

In "Roughing It in California" Twain tells of his dismissal from the Call, and his disastrous financial losses in Nevada mining stock. His months of pocket mining yielded such memorable stories as the "Jumping Frog," and "Tom Quartz."