

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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When Columbia Was a Metropolis

Major Sullivan, the first alcalde of Columbia, gave the gold rush community its euphonious name. In 1852 the town was mapped out; in the spring of 1854 it was incorporated. As Dr. Robert Burns told those in attendance at the Historical Foundation meeting there recently, the town boasts of its Broadway, Pacific, and other grand names for the streets, its hotels, full quota of saloons, banks, stores and variety of business establishments – a typical town of the gold country which is now an historical monument.

Dr. Rockwell D. Hunt, director of the California History Foundation of the College of the Pacific, writes in his "California Ghost Towns Live Again": "In the early 1850s Columbia could boast of 143 faro banks, with a capital of over \$1,500,000, four banks, 30 saloons, three express offices, 27 produce stores, seven bakeries, a printing shop, a stadium for bull-and-bear fights a theater, and a brewery. It should be added that in 1856 when the miners built St. Anne's Catholic Church; there were three drug stores, six laundries, a daguerreotype studio, and a Chinatown."

From time to time, for years past, Dr. Hunt told his audience of interested historians, the desire had been expressed that Columbia, embodying the remains and the charm of the gold days to a superlative degree, might become a part of the California State Park System. The dream came true, Columbia became the capital for a day.

"Little did Charles Schneider think," a reporter wrote after July 15, 1945, "when he outfitted his barber shop with plush-covered chairs and windows decorated in gold braid and silken tassels back in 1849, that his place of business would serve as the Capitol of California 95 years later. The building, now used as the justice court, was converted into the governor's office for the day and there Gol. Earl Warren signed the measure which made Columbia a state park."

We visited another barber shop in Columbia – the only one, we think, which exists in the town today. Dr. Burns, the president of the College of the Pacific and a member of the State Parks Commission, was our guide. The proprietor of this shop has been in business in the same location for 54 years and his predecessor had

operated it for the 50 years previous. The barber chair, the tiny cast-iron stove, the pictures and mirror on the wall were all put there nearly 100 years ago. With his broom handle, for he had been sweeping up when our company arrived, he pointed out two framed citations on one wall of which he was visibly proud. One was his commission as supervisor of Tuolumne County and the other an award of merit from the County Chamber of Commerce as being one of the pioneer merchants. This popular business man of Columbia (I am sorry I neglected to jot down his name), sold his property to the state retaining a long-term lease. Dr. Burns related that he had also been most helpful in acquiring other Columbia main street property to complete the Historical Monument and named him one of the outstanding civic and state minded persons in the community.

During the Foundation meeting we heard informing talks by Harold Schutt of the Tulare County Historical Society, on the Mechanics of local historical societies; Warren Howell, San Francisco bookdealer, on Historical Society Publications; Locating and Evaluation of Historical Information by Frank F. Latta, director, Kern County Museum. Dr. William G. Paden, superintendent of Schools of Alameda and Mrs. Paden, gave entertaining talks on their several years of searching for the various pioneer trails across the plains to California. Mrs. Paden is the author of several books relating to these trails, all fascinating reading.

Carroll Hall, curator of Sutter's Fort at Sacramento, spoke on The Small Historical Museum. The questions presented to all the speakers were most interesting and the answers most informative.