

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

August 22, 1955

'High Sierra Country'

"American Folkways" books were first published in 1941. Many critics have said of the series that since that time this "notable series" has maintained its "high standard and quality" and has "become "a landmark in American regional literature." An author of the west who added to the series a number of years ago was Gertrude Atherton with "Golden Gate Country" and now there comes to our attention a newly published book by Oscar Lewis "High Sierra Country."

The jacket cover of this new book to be added to the list of Californiana, tells us that there are 430 miles of rugged peaks and granite spires, interspersed with mountain meadows, crystal lakes and snow-fed streams to make up this area known as the High Sierra Country. A link in the vast chain which stretches from the southernmost tip of South America to the fogbound islands of the outer Aleutians —it is among the great mountain regions of the world.

The High Sierra's eventful history, Mr. Lewis tells us, begins with the first expedition across its lofty summits in 1827. Stories of the first trailbreakers are still among the most exciting adventure yarns of the Far West.

Lewis also reminds us that Helen Hunt Jackson immortalized this period in her dramatic account of Sierra travel, "Ramona." From the early days of the Gold Rush to the turn of the century, the High Sierra country was dramatized by storytellers. There was Horace Greeley's tale of his terrifying trip in a stage driven by John Monk at breakneck speed along ill-defined trails, in Mark Twain's "Roughing It" and his story of Jim Smiley and the famous "Jumping Frog." There were also legends about historic bad men, such as Black Bart, who held up 27 stages without ever firing a gun.

In "High Sierra Country" Lewis has produced a rich and fascinating chronicle of one of the most interesting parts of the United States. The book is published by Little, Brown and Company in association with Buel, Sloan and Pearce, Inc. and is priced at \$4.50.

The volume is divided into eight parts including something for everybody, Trail Breakers, A Valley Called Ahwahnee, Over the Hump, Gold Lake, Nataqua, and other Delusions; Some Sierra Superlatives, A Gallery of Bad Men, Home on the Range, and ends with an Index.

We have been hearing so much about Jedediah Smith, since the California Historical Society published his memoirs, edited by Carl I. Wheat, that it is doubly interesting to read Lewis' account of the life of this young man to whom belongs the distinction of having first made his way over the Sierra Nevada range in May of 1827, at the age of 32 years. On May 27th of that year, he was set upon by a band of Comanche Indians in the vicinity of Cimarron River, and slain.

So far as is known, according to Lewis, the first white men to look into the mighty gorge of Yosemite were members of the party led by Joseph Reddeford Walker in 1833. Then the author goes on to tell of the many enthusiastic future explorers in the Valley and the naturalists who wrote glowingly of its grandeur. His chapter "Over the Hump" tells of the various means of transportation, of the roadside inns of the early days, and of the early stage drivers and bandits. He even discusses the history of camel trains in California, and their trek in 1861 over the Sierra Nevada by the Big Tree route.

The last chapter in High Sierra 'Country concerns The Ancient and Benevolent Order of E Clampus Vitus—an order having a ritual that broadly burlesqued those of other lodges, and the primary purpose of which was to foster the miners' taste for uninhibited humor. Their primary objective was the relief of the community's widows and orphans—"but more particularly the widows"—its initiation ceremonies were in keeping with that high purpose. Much of the early history of the order, Mr. Lewis writes, is now obscure, for no official records were kept of the numerous chapters which flourished in California in the 1850s.

This book "High Sierra Country," would in my opinion be an entertaining Christmas gift for young and old alike. It is a splendid reference book, aside from being pleasant reading.

A fine mention of the Monterey Peninsula appears in the Quarterly of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, published in Washington, D.C. Under the heading "Point Lobos." The editors write: Based on studies made with the Carnegie Institution of Washington, the Carnegie Corporation and the Save-the-Redwoods League, the California State Printing Division has just published Point Lobos Reserve: Interpretation of a Primitive Landscape, under editorship of Aubrey Drury. It presents the varied facets

of this outstanding area in California's chain of state parks by specialists in various phases.

Newton B. Drury, trustee of the National Trust and chief of the California Division of Beaches and Parks is author of the chapter on the "Master Plan of the Future."