

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

January 24, 1958

Gold Discovery Days

Notes from "California and Its Gold Regions" published in 1849 has been given to us by Burton S. Boundey, one of the Peninsula's noted artists. The book from which the notes were copied, was at one time in the possession of the Boundey family, but Mr. Boundey does not know the present owner. It was a booklet with a yellow paper cover and was, he believes, published in the east.

The notes begin: "Population of California in 1842 compiled by a Frenchman. M. de Mofras: Californians descended from Spaniards, 4700; Americans from the United States, 360; English, Scotch and Irish, 300; European Spaniards, 80; French and Canadians, 80; Germans, Italians, Portuguese and Sandwich Islanders, 90; Mexicans, 90. Total population, 5,000. Since then the population has vastly increased so that it is possible not less than 20,000 persons are now in Upper California (1848)."

The writer goes on to relate his activities in California in the gold discovery days. "I delayed here to participate in the first celebration of our national holiday at the Fort, but on the fifth resumed the journey, and proceeded 25 miles up the American Fork to a point on it now known as the lower mines, or Mormon Diggings. The hillsides were thickly strewn with canvas tents and brush arbors, a store was erected and several boarding shanties in operation.

"The day was intensely hot, yet about 200 men were at work in the full glare of the sun, washing for gold some with tin pans, some with close woven Indian baskets, and a greater part had a rude machine known as a cradle. This is on rockers, six or eight feet long, open at the foot, and at its head has a coarse grate or sieve. The bottom is rounded, with small cleats nailed across it. Four men are required to work this machine, one digs the ground in the bank close by the stream, another carries it to the cradle and empties it on the grate, a third gives a violent rocking motion to the machine, while a fourth dashes on water from the stream itself.

"The sieve keeps the coarse stones from entering the cradle, the current of water washes off the earthy matter, and the gravel is gradually carried out of the foot of the machine leaving the gold mixed with a very

heavy, fine black sand above the first cleats. The sand and gold mixed together are then drawn off through auger holes into a pan below, dried in the sun and afterward separated by blowing off the sand. A party of four men thus employed average \$100 a day. The Indians and those who have nothing but pans or willow baskets gradually wash out the earth and separate the gravel by hand leaving nothing, but the gold mixed with sand, which is separated in the manner described. The gold in the lower mines is in fine bright scales.

"As we ascended the south branch of the American Fork," the writer continues "the country became broken and mountainous and at the Sawmill, 25 miles above the lower washings, or 50 miles from Sutter's, the hills rise to 1,000 ft above the Sacramento Plain. Here a species of pine grows. Capt. Sutter sent Mr. Marshall to build a sawmill at that place. When the water was set on the wheel, the tailrace was found to be too narrow. Mr. Marshall, to save labor, let water directly into the race with a strong current so as to wash it wider and deeper. A large bed of mud and gravel was carried to race.

"One day Mr. Marshall, walking down to the race, observed some glittering particles at its upper edge, he gathered a few, examined them and became satisfied of their value. He returned to the Fort. Told the captain and they agreed to keep it secret until a certain grist mill at Sutter's was finished. However, the news got out and the discovery of gold spread like magic."

January 24, 1848 is a date that should be observed in California today. One hundred and ten years ago the happenings as described in these notes were being enacted at Colma, now a State Historical Monument.