

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

January 29, 1958

Gold Fields of '49

Today we will continue with the report of the discovery of gold in California as noted in "California and its Gold Regions," published in 1849. The anniversary of this historic event occurred on Jan. 24th. Coloma, the setting for the discovery at Sutter's Mill, is now an historical landmark and administered by the State Division of Beaches and Parks.

"In a few weeks hundreds of men were drawn here," the author of the notes writes. "At the time of my visit, but little more than three months after its first discovery, it was estimated 4,000 people were employed. Mr. Marshall was living near the mill. He informed me that there were many persons employed above and below him, that they used the same machines at lower levels or washings and that the success was about the same, ranging from one to three ounces of gold daily per man. This is gold, too, is in scales a little coarser than the lower mines.

"From the mill, Mr. Marshall guided me up the mountain upon the opposite side, or north fork of the south fork, where, in the bed of the small streams or ravines, now dry, a great deal of coarse gold has been found. I saw several parties at work, all doing well, a great many specimens were shown to me, some as heavy as four or five ounces in weight. This gold cannot have been carried far by water but must have remained near where it was first deposited from the rock that once bound it. I inquired of many people if they had encountered gold in its matrix. In every instance they replied that they had not, but that gold was invariably mixed with washed gravel, or lodged in the crevices of other rocks. All said they had found gold in greater or less quantity in the ravines and the numerous small gullies that occur in this mountainous region."

On the 7th of July the writer of the notes left the region, crossed a small stream emptying into the American fork three or four miles below the saw mill. He struck a stream, which he said was called Weber's Creek, washings of Sunol & Co. Here 30 Indians were employed, getting gold similar to that found on the main fork. He proceeded up stream for about eight miles, seeing a "great many people and Indians, some engaged in the bed of the stream, others in small side valleys." He described the valleys as "exceedingly rich,

two ounces considered ordinary, average for a day's yield."

Another note told this tale: "A small gutter 100 yards long, four feet wide and two or three feet deep yielded William Daly and Perry McCoon a short time ago, \$17,000 in gold. Another small ravine shown me had yielded \$12,000 in gold. Hundreds of similar ravines apparently were untouched."

Our author of "California and its Gold Regions," reported in his diary that the country on either side of Weber's Creek, much broken by hills and intersected by small streams and ravines had hardly been scratched although thousands of ounces of gold had been carried away. He also believed that no capital was required to obtain this gold as the laboring man needed nothing but a pick and shovel and tin pan, while others made use of butcher knives to pick gold out of crevices of rocks in pieces of 1 to 6 ounces. "I have seen no laboring man from the mines who does not show his three, or four pounds of gold.

"Gold places near San Fernando have long been known, but there has been little brought for lack of water. This is a spur that puts off from Sierra Nevada. There is every reason to believe that in intervening spaces of 500 miles which are entirely unexplored, there must be many hidden and rich deposits. The placer gold is now substituted for currency and passes freely at \$16 per ounce."