

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Historic Woods

The history of the various wood grown in California and its use by the pioneers in the state, is represented in the trowel handle which laid the cornerstone of the Bank of America headquarters in San Francisco in 1941. Each county in California was invited to send a small piece of wood which would be historic and representative of the county, to be used in fashioning a beautiful trowel for the occasion.

Riverside County sent orange wood from one of the two parent navel oranges trees brought to Riverside from Bahia, Brazil, in 1873. This tree was replanted in the courtyard of the Riverside Mission Inn in 1903 by Pres. Theodore Roosevelt, but died in 1921. These parent trees have been regarded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as the most important importations it ever made.

Redwood came from Sacramento County, one of the original redwood shakes used on the roof of Sutter's Fort, built in 1839 by Capt. John A. Sutter on the site of the present city of Sacramento. Nine years later James W. Marshall discovered gold on Sutter's holding at Colma on Jan. 24, 1848, starting the great gold rush in 1849.

Our Neighboring county San Benito, once a part of Monterey County, is represented on the gavel by pine from the threshold of the adobe home in San Juan Bautista erected in the early 1800's and later occupied by Gen. Jose Castro, last commandant general of California under Mexican rule.

Oak from an ox yoke used in a wagon train which started from Council Bluffs, Iowa, in 1851, crossing the plains to San Francisco, was contributed by San Bernardino County for the trowel handle. This yoke was made about 1846 by Nathan Wixom, a farmer on a homestead in the San Bernardino mountains.

Very appropriately, incense cedar was chosen from Mission San Diego de Alcalá, first church erected on what is now the Pacific Coast of the United States. Father Junipero Serra founded the mission in 1769. Timber for the church was hauled from Cuyamaca Mountains, 50 miles east of San Diego. It is now a parish church.

Teak from the "Apollo," one of the first vessels to sail from the east to California after the arrival of the news of the discovery of gold, represents San Francisco County. It arrived in San Francisco in 1849 and later became a waterfront store. Workmen, digging for the foundations for another bank building in 1921, uncovered timbers from this pioneer vessel.

San Joaquin County has a piece of redwood in the towel from the original home built by Captain Charles Weber, on Weber Point in Stockton in 1850. Capt. Weber arrived in California overland in 1841, settled in San Jose, and then went to Tuleburg, now Stockton, and settled on a grant there.

Pine from Mission San Luis Obispo de Polosa, founded in 1772 by Father Serra, represents the county to the south. This mission is supposed to have had the first tile roof in California.

Redwood from California's state capital building at San Jose, erected in 1849 to be used as a hotel, was used from was used from Santa Clara County for the trowel. The first session of the legislature met here on Dec. 15, 1849, and a second session on Jan. 6, 1851. A. P. Giannini was born in his father's hotel in San Jose on May 6, 1870.

Redwood also represented Santa Cruz. The wood was taken from an old home in which Bret Harte spent his honeymoon in 1862. Oak from the stairway in the house built in 1851 in Shasta by Dr. Benj. Shurtleff was contributed by Shasta County. The stairs came around the Horn from Maine. Pine from Sierra County Court House was chosen by Sierra County; Built in 1855, it is the second oldest courthouse in continual use in the state. Yew wood was given by Siskiyou for the bank's towel. This wood grows only in Siskiyou and Humboldt Counties.

Pine from California's third state capitol at Benicia (1853-1854) represents Solano County and Sonoma County has a bit of oak from the workshop of Luther Burbank in Santa Rosa. Stanislaus County chose to send Douglas fir taken from the remains of the first dam in the San Joaquin Valley, built in 1852 on the Stanislaus River near Knights Ferry bridge. Sutter County sent a piece of wood from the largest walnut tree in the work at Yuba City, 102 feet high, until cut down in 1938. Rings in the butt indicated that it was 75 years old.

Oak from the William B. Ide adobe home, built in 1845, near Red Bluff was sent by Tehama County. Ide was a

Bear Flag Party leader in 1846. Trinity County choose also to give oak wood from the head of a keg packed by mule back in 1858 to a brewery and store operated at North Fork by Meckel Bros. Redwood from the General Sherman tree in Sequoia National Forest represents Tulare County. It is estimated to be from 3,000 to 4,000 years old. Tuolumne County sent oak from the cabin of Mark Twain on Jackass Hill, locale of many Mark Twain stories.

Pine from Mission San Buenaventura at Ventura represents Ventura County and oak was chosen from Yolo County. Yuba contributed oak from the home of William T. Ellis in Marysville. Ellis operated a steamer line between Marysville and San Francisco in the early 1850's.

Thus ends the history of the wood from 58 counties contributed to form the handle of the trowel used by the Bank of America when the cornerstone was laid for the bank's headquarters in San Francisco in 1941.

Oak wood appears to be the most popular choice having 17 pieces in the towel handle. Thirteen bits of pine, eight pieces of redwood and four of walnut, added to other beautiful woods of California, make up the Bank of America keepsake trowel.