

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 2, 1960

Gold Rush Sites

To revisit the sites of the gold rush, to marvel at the beauty of the autumn colors at this season of the year, and to absorb a bit of the history of the "Days of '49," we spent four days last week wandering around Columbia and Georgetown. The weather was just right, not too warm, and the trees, vines and shrubs seemed to burst out in color each day just for our pleasure.

Columbia, "The Gem of the Southern Mines," was chosen by the State of California as being the "best preserved" of all the towns to the state's Gold Rush country when, in 1945, it was decided to maintain a state park at Columbia which would best convey the atmosphere of those days to the mid-1880's. The administration of the historical monument was turned over to the Division of Beaches and Parks and, since that year, many buildings within the park area have been completely restored so they would appear as they did during the golden years when treasure was being reaped from the gulches and hillsides. Today the Wells Fargo building, the Masonic Temple and other historical buildings are offered as complete restorations or reconstructions from the period when Columbia was the second largest town to California.

We ate our evening meal one day at Columbia House - one of the old buildings which has been completely rehabilitated so that, to a great extent, the period of the gold rush has been preserved in the decor as well as the menu.

Realizing that as years go by the people of California and the whole nation will appreciate more and more the heritage which has come down to us from those days of '49, the management of the Columbia House told us, they have made every effort to bring a breath of the Gold Rush days into the mid-Twentieth Century.

One of the finest buildings ever erected on the Mother Lode - it is said - is the Old Columbia Grammar School, first dedicated on Nov. 1, 1860, to serve boys and girls of a thriving gold rush boom town. The old red brick schoolhouse, which continued in operation until 1937, has been restored as it stood in 1860 and is part of the Columbia Historic State Park. Contributions of California public school pupils and teachers made possible this memorial to pioneer education in California. The

restoration project was sponsored by the California Teachers Assn., and restoration work was supervised by the State Division of Beaches and Parks and the State Division of Architecture.

The centennial rededication of the Columbia School will take place Saturday, Nov 5, at 11 a.m. A welcome to Columbia will be extended by Mrs. Peggy Leever who has been elected honorary mayor for the occasion. We met Mrs. Leever in her attractive gift shop and extended our congratulations. Columbia will also have open house for many of the distinguished local early graduates, as did Monterey a few weeks ago at Colton Hall.

Present on this occasion on Nov. 5th will be Joseph R. Knowland, former chairman of the Division of Beaches and Parks; Charles A. DeTurk, chief of the Division; Donald I. Segerstrom, Olampatrarch of Matuca Chapter of the Ancient and Honorable Order of E Clampus Vitus; the representatives of the Masonic Lodge, who will relay the cornerstone.

As we walked along the main street in Columbia we saw and visited a number of sturdy old buildings. Among these are the town hall; the little engine house in which is to be found one of the oldest fire-extinguishing apparatus in the state; "The Gold Dust Exchange," the bank of D. O. Mills & Company where home-made candies have replaced the golden treasure which once poured over its counters; and the Pioneer Saloon. In one of the old corner buildings a pioneer museum is maintained.

If you wish for an adventure into the past and a breath of good, clean mountain air and a hearty welcome from the inhabitants, take a trip into the gold country and we promise you, you will return home with a new lease on life and ready to go to the grind again with renewed vigor.