

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 4, 1960

### Sierra Pioneers

Our search for history led us to Drytown in Amador County which was not a dry town at all, for soon after it was founded in 1848 there were 28 saloons there. It is now almost a ghost town with all the buildings gone except an old store and the town hall. It was not unusual in 1849 to wash as much as a hundred dollars in gold from a single pan, the historical marker related. Here and there we observed such names along the highway as Blood Gulch, Murder's Gulch and Rattlesnake Gulch, which in those few words told the story of what had happened there in the early days of the Gold Rush. The names we hope will never be modernized to suit the progress and the invasion of new residents, highways and subdivisions, for the old timers realize, that history, is what brings the newcomers to the old places they have cherished these many years.

It was near Drytown that the first gold was discovered in Amador County. The county was named in honor of Jose Maria Amador, a miner in that region in 1848 and previously major-domo of Mission San Jose. Jackson was made the county seat. Amador County is in the center of the Mother Lode district in the Sierra Nevada. One branch of the Kit Carson Trail went through Jackson, its direction being that of a later stage road to Virginia City in Nevada, and that of the present Jackson-Silver Lake highway.

In Eldorado County we visited Georgetown before making the return trip to Monterey County. El Dorado County was another of the original 27 counties. The first county seat was Coloma, but it was superseded by Placerville in 1857. The Spanish term El Dorado probably was chosen because gold was discovered there for the name means "the gilded man" or "gilded one."

In Georgetown a company of sailors under the leadership of George Phipps followed and in 1850 motley camps and tents and shanties grew up on the creek at the foot of what is now known as Main street.

Georgetown was first named Growlersberg and was also known as the "pride of the mountains," because of the cultural advantages of the little town, the beauty of its hill setting among the pines, oaks and cedars of the

Georgetown divide and the mild and tonic air of its 2,650-foot elevation.

We learned that Greenwood in Eldorado County was proud of its social advantages not enjoyed by its neighbors, notably a well patronized theater. The town was named for John Greenwood, an old trapper who established a trading post there in 1848. Another historical character was John A. Stone, a pioneer songwriter of the '50's who was drawn there because of the theater. In the cemetery there is a small slab of stone bearing the initials J.A.S. and the date January 24, 1863.

Journeying on we soon came to Pilot Hill, a community visited by John C. Fremont and his men when, early in March 1844, they followed the well-defined trails of Indians leading out of the High Sierra and down into the foothills of the valley. We were told that some of the citizens of these mountain communities are still looking forward to the opening up of this exceptionally fine mountain region by a road through to Lake Tahoe.

North of Pilot Hill we had the delightful experience of being invited into a grand old relic of the early '60's, the Bayley House, erected by Alexander John Bayley, a native of Vermont who came to California in 1849 on the "Edward Everett." From 1851 to 1861 Bayley owned the Oak Valley House, at Pilot Hill. After it was destroyed by fire, he built the large three story brick structure still known by his name. Believing that the overland railroad would pass that way, Mr. Bayley expended over \$20,000 in the construction of his splendid old hostelry. He opened the house May 15, 1862, but the railroad never came near it.

If our readers ever pass that way be sure and stop to enjoy and study this beautiful structure. We do not think we have ever seen a more charming house, even in our travels in the southeast where the ante bellum houses are so architecturally correct. The Bayley House is now a private home and not open to the public. It is occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Clarey Steves Jr. and their three children. Mrs. Steves, who fits right into the history and atmosphere of this old home, made us welcome and gave us a tour of the many rooms and told a great deal of the history of the place.

The great house beneath its aged oaks and locusts is as firm and substantial as the day it was built but the reported beautiful and terraced garden laid out so carefully withered long ago.