

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Ghost Towns

"Ghost Towns and Mining camps of California," by Remi Nadeau has just come to my attention and I am grateful to the friend who loaned me a copy to read and enjoy. It was printed by the Ward Ritchie Press of Los Angeles—the first printing in May, 1964, and second printing June of this year.

In a postscript: "Other California Mining Towns" there are listed:

Cambria, started as a mining town during California's copper craze of 1863, it was later a center for quicksilver mine in the Santa Lucia Range. It is located on California Highway 1, between Morro Bay and San Simeon.

Los Burros and Gorda, on the coast side of the Santa Lucia Range west of Jolon, in Monterey County, comprised a small gold mining district first worked by the Spanish. Activity began in earnest with the discovery of "Last Chance Mine" on Alder Creek in 1887. Los Burros and Gorda were reported active as late as 1916.

New Idria in San Benito County, first operated in 1850. This famous mine is second only to New Almaden quicksilver mine in Santa Clara County. New Idria, was named for Idria quicksilver district in Austria. The mine and town are located in the Diablo Range sixty-six miles south of Hollister. The ride there is enjoyable and very beautiful in the spring of the year when the fruit trees are in blossom and the wild flowers in bloom.

New Almaden was named for the famed Almaden quicksilver center in Spain. First extracted by the Indians for war paint and other uses, the cinnabar deposits were known to the Spanish speaking Californias as early as 1824.

"The mine was officially located by Andres Castilero in 1845," so the author wrote, "first as a silver and gold mine, and then for its more important content, quicksilver. But the mine soon became the prize in the celebrated dispute that rocked the courts for many years. The issue was intensified when California's Gold Rush put a premium on quicksilver for its value in smelting gold bearing ores.

"One of the longest producers among American mines, New Almaden has turned out a sizable proportion of the nation's quicksilver. The remaining relics of older times are a tumble-down schoolhouse, a powder magazine, and some old cemeteries.

There is the small and charming settlement a bit below the original mine, which is well worth seeing. Some of the buildings are of adobe construction and others which line the main street are of brick, all of which are occupied. A visit there is well worth the charming drive and the view of the scenery on the way toward San Jose, turning off to the left a few miles to the south of that city.

Nadeau writes in his foreword: "I have been hunting and haunting ghost towns since childhood. My mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. Remi Nadeau, took me on old trails to the abandoned towns as soon as I was old enough to travel. Both of them have visited most of the towns mentioned in the book. My wife, Margaret was sporting enough even to accompany me to Bodie and Aurora during our honeymoon in the Sierras, and has since bumped over many a sandy road to a lonely desert camp. Our children—Christine, Barbara, and Remi—have more than once fought their way through sagebrush to view a few crumbling ruins."

Nadeau, the author of "Ghost Towns and Mining Camps of California," certainly had a background for the subject he chose to write about and we recommend it for the historical facts and the many illustrations it contains.