

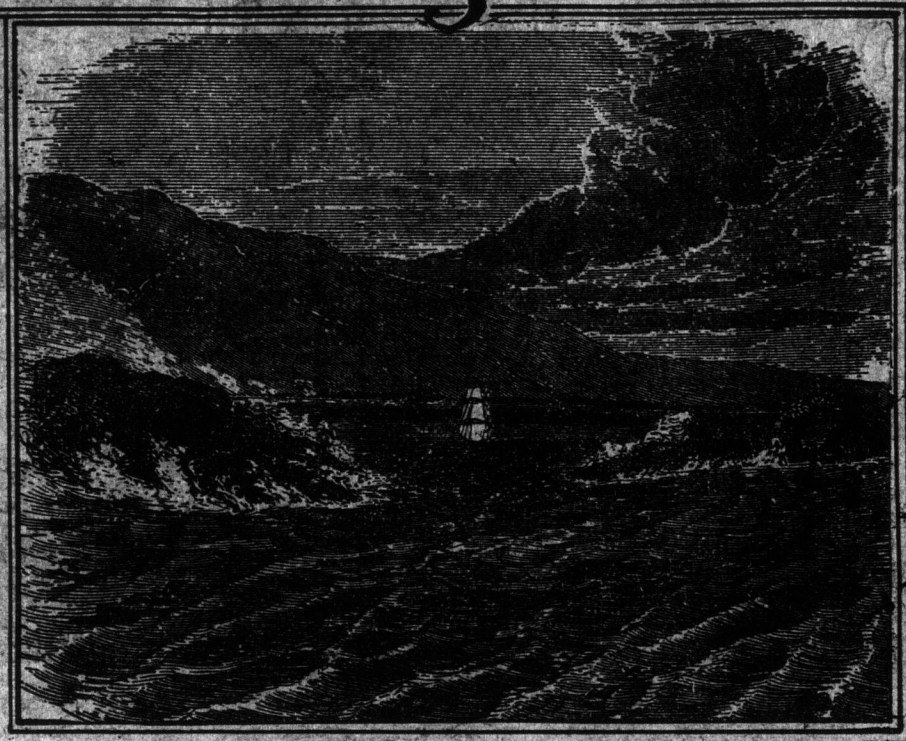
What California Was in the Rough BY D.W. HIGGINS



RUSH FOR THE GOLD REGIONS.



SUTTER'S MILL.



ENTRANCE TO THE GOLDEN GATE.

(Continued)
HERE is so much of interest and value to the reader of the present day in the "Annals," that I find it extremely difficult to compress into the three or four pages, which my good friends of The Colonist have placed at my disposal, the 1,000 pages of printed matter that good fortune and a kind friend have brought to my hands, and at the same time weave between the lines incidents that come within my own recollection of men and events fifty-odd years ago. But the popular interest that these reminiscent tales have aroused has lightened the toil and made the work almost a pleasant task.

In 1849, the site of San Francisco was covered with sand dunes which came down close to the water's edge. At first the business part of the city was built partly on these sandhills and partly on mud flats. By degrees much of the sand was thrown into the flats and the sea was forced back. Then wharves were built for shipping, and warehouses lined those wharves. The Hudson's Bay Co. were among the first mercantile firms to erect a warehouse. They came in about 1845 and drove a good trade until the chief factor committed suicide, and the influx of miners destroyed the fur trade, when they retired.

In 1849, ships began to arrive from all parts of the world with passengers and cargoes. The United States tariff was then very light, and goods of every description were piled up in the warehouses and on the wharves. When there was no more storage accommodation the goods were auctioned off at very low prices. The late James A. McCrea, who will be recalled by all "58ers" (he having conducted an auction business on Wharf street until 1870), was one of the auctioneers of surplus stocks at San Francisco. Goods were almost given away, to the dismay of importers and consignors and the profit of the purchasers.

From 1849 to 1851, San Francisco, which had begun to grow rapidly, was destroyed by fire six times. Millions were lost by each visitation; but undaunted by these unhappy occurrences, the inhabitants began to build while yet the cinders were hot. Among those who suffered largely by the fires was the late H. E. Wilby, formerly of Esquimalt town. This gentleman had imported a valuable stock of sherries and other wines from Oporto, Portugal, where his father was an extensive wine merchant. He lost all his stock in one of the conflagrations. Mr. Wilby, it will be remembered, some seventeen years ago, left this city for a visit to his friends in the Old Country. When on board a stamer that plied between Victoria and San Francisco, a violent storm arose, and it was while assisting a lady passenger to cross the saloon that a monster wave boarded the vessel. He was tossed across the saloon and his head struck with great force against one of the stanchions. He was apparently not much hurt; but when he reached Oporto he suddenly died, and an examination showed a fracture of the skull.

Early in 1849 San Francisco was organized into a municipality, with a mayor, assessor and treasurer, and a full board of aldermen and a police force. One of the first acts of the aldermen was to vote the mayor and the other officials salaries of \$10,000 each, and themselves six thousand dollars. Of course, there was a great outcry. Indignation meetings were held and the aldermen reduced their own salaries to four thousand dollars, but allowed the mayor and the other officials' pay to stand. The first mayor was John W. Geary, who seems to have been an excellent official, and his name is still revered.

Courts were organized about this time, and Wm. B. Almond was appointed to try cases. He was a blunt, overbearing man, with a horror of long speeches. He took a keen delight in cutting discussions short and in deciding cases on ex parte testimony. On one occasion, having heard the complaining witness only, he decided that he had given straightforward evidence, and gave him a verdict. The opposing lawyer protested, and was proceeding to quote from Blackstone, when the judge thundered that he had already decided the case and that further remarks were unnecessary. "I am aware of that," replied the limb of the law; "but I thought I would read a passage or two to show you what a d— fool Blackstone was." The report was not original, having been made first by

an English barrister, but it sounded good and had an effect in shaping the judge's conduct in other cases.

In 1861, the writer was present in a court room at Olympia, Washington, when a case was being heard before the chief justice of the then territory. This official had been appointed by President Lincoln and was an illiterate lawyer from Illinois. The chief justice sat on a rickety chair with his heels on a pine table, about which counsel on both sides sat and debated. The "judge" chewed tobacco, immoderately, and squirted juice, such as did not fall upon his shirt front, into a wooden box filled with sawdust. The lawyers also chewed and used the same receptacle. I remember that one of the lawyers was named Farrar. He came from Washington City and was a cultivated, able man. His opponent, like the chief justice, was a regular backwoods lawyer, who spoke with a nasal twang and dislocated the Queen's English in a frightful manner. Occasionally the "judge" would pare his finger nails or whittle a stick, and declare a "pint" well taken or otherwise. The "Annals" declare that Judge Almond, while his court was in session, pared his corns and listened to the arguments at the same time!

Between the 1st of January and the 30th of June, 1849, fifteen thousand immigrants landed at San Francisco, of which number only two hundred were females. At that time the city was a mud hole, and people often sank to their armpits in the ooze. Wheeling was impossible and the streets were made the repositories for all sorts of rubbish and filth. There were no street lights, and at night every man carried a lantern and a pistol. Gambling was a peculiar feature of the city at that time. It was the amusement of the place. Every saloon was a gambling hell. Monte, faro, roulette, rondo, rouge et noir and vingt et un were the games chiefly played. Beautiful and well-dressed women dealt the cards, while bawdy pictures hung on the walls. A band of music and coal oil lamps gave a joyous rapture to the scene and attracted the homesick stranger who, far from home and kindred, sought relaxation and company. The sums staked were occasionally enormous. As high as \$20,000 was risked on the turn of a card. The professional gamblers paid huge rents for the privilege of plying their trade in the saloons, and the tables were piled high with heaps of gold and silver coins, bags of gold dust and nuggets. Judges and clergymen, physicians and advocates, merchants and clerks, contractors and laborers, jostled each other in their eagerness to reach the tables and bet.

At that time there were between three and four hundred square-rigged vessels lying in the bay, unable to leave for want of crews. Many of these never got away, but just remained there, until they rotted. Some of these vessels were drawn up on the flats and used as lodging houses. For every service, however slight, half a dollar was demanded, for every article, however trifling, the charge was twenty-five cents. Admission to a circus cost three dollars, and a private box, with no questions asked, fifty dollars. Eight dollars a day was asked for good board and five dollars a day for indifferent board. A hearty meal at a restaurant would cost from two to five dollars. Wheat flour and pork fetched forty dollars the half barrel, potatoes and brown sugar thirty-seven and a-half cents a pound. A small loaf of bread or a pound of cheese, forty cents. Boots from forty to one hundred dollars a pair, and laundrymen received twelve dollars a dozen for washing. Laborers' wages were one dollar an hour, skilled mechanics were paid from twelve to twenty dollars a day. Carpenters got sixteen dollars a day. It was estimated that every brick in a house cost one dollar. Rents were correspondingly enormous. Three

thousand dollars a month, in advance, was paid for a shack store, and for a frame hotel one hundred and twenty thousand dollars a year rental was paid. Money was loaned at from eight to fifteen per cent, a month with good security. The value of real estate rose tremendously, and the holders of a few centrally-situated lots, bought at \$12 each, suddenly found themselves millionaires. Clergymen were paid ten thousand dollars a year. Millions in pure gold reached San Francisco every month, but in the midst of all this prosperity there was much misery, and many committed suicide or wrote for money to take them home.

Amid the crush and confusion hundreds died of destitution, and disappointment, while others took to the road, and robbed their more fortunate fellows. Incendiarism was frequent, and nearly all the great fires were believed to have been purposely caused. A band of bad men organized a club called "The Hounds," and beat, murdered, or robbed the innocent immigrants. The depredations of this gang resembled those of "Soapy Smith's" desperadoes at Skagway six or seven years ago. They were finally scattered by the action of law-abiding citizens, who rose and expelled them.

On the 29th of October, 1850, California was admitted to the Union, becoming the thirty-first State. The announcement was received with an outburst of enthusiasm, the firing of cannon, the ringing of bells, the hoisting of banners and bunting, and there was a general cessation of business. By the terms of the constitution all foreigners resident in the State at the date of the proclamation became American citizens without further ceremony, and several thousand British subjects were thus made Americans.

The city authorities, in their anxiety to make the town presentable, clean the streets, secure good drainage and a water supply, made many ridiculous and expensive mistakes. The city was soon plunged deeply in debt and heavy taxes were imposed to meet current expenses. At that time many claims to land within the city limits were put forward, the claimants presenting grants which they swore had been issued to them by the Mexican government prior to the purchase of the territory by the United States. These claims hung like a cloud over the titles of much of the best property, and many holders were unable to dispose of their lots or procure loans upon them in consequence. They hung over the property for a long time, and greatly retarded the growth of the place. After several years' contention the grants were all discovered to be forgeries and were disallowed; but the injury they had inflicted on property-owners was incalculable.

Among the names of prominent citizens that appear in the "Annals" is that of John T. Little. Mr. Little was an active and intelligent man, who formerly possessed a considerable fortune at San Francisco; but lost it all through the frequent fires and the failure of a bank. He came to Victoria in 1858 and built a wharf and warehouse on Wharf street, at a point a little north of the foot of Yates street. He also built a residence on Wharf street. Mrs. Little was an excellent woman and the

mother of twelve young children — eleven of whom were girls! Notwithstanding the heavy cares of so large a family Mrs. Little was constantly among the sick and destitute, who were numerous at that time. To Mr. Little belongs the credit of introducing the first plant for the manufacture of illuminating gas in the province. Aided by a Mr. Calvert he lighted up his own premises and wharf, and promoted the passage of a bill through the legislature which allowed the company to charge \$12.50 per thousand. This was the beginning of the Victoria Gas Co., which, after being more than forty-five years in operation, was recently acquired by the B. C. Electric Rail-

way Co.

Mr. Little returned to San Francisco in 1865. His daughters, who grew into lovely and accomplished women, all married well. A duel between General Denver and Hon. Edward Gilbert, a member of Congress, took place in 1853. Denver was a noted duellist, but Gilbert scarcely knew which was the business end of a rifle. At the second fire Gilbert was killed. Gen. Denver left the state at once and went to Colorado, where he founded the great city that still bears his name. He died many years ago.

Early in 1850 the first volunteer fire department was formed, and by the prowess and skill of these firemen much valuable property was saved from destruction. The competition for the positions of chief and assistants was keen, and often resulted in hostile collisions. The firemen entered largely into the politics of the day, and at that time few aspirants for office whose names were not enrolled as members need hope for success. D. C. Broderick, who became United States senator in 1859, made his start in politics as foreman of one of these fire companies. Another much more notorious individual who joined the fire department for political purposes was one James P. Casey. He was an ex-convict, and for publishing the fact he murdered an editor on the streets of San Francisco. For this act he was hanged by a vigilance committee. When the body had been cut down it was conveyed to the Crescent fire company's hall (of which company he was foreman), and the body lay in state for two days. Around his neck was seen the blue mark of discoloration where the rope had choked the breath out of his wicked body. An attempt was made to dignify the obsequies into a sort of "Julius Caesar affair with a modern Marc Antony to make the oration. The attempt failed. Julius Caesar was there in the form of Jim Casey. There the analogy ended. A band of music played a dirge from the hall to the Catholic cemetery, and the rough element followed in procession, but there was no other demonstration, and there was no Marc Antony.

A striking feature of the fire department at that time was the election of a member of No. 5 company of a pretty young lady. She was a Miss Lillie Hitchcock, who from a small child had acquired a passion for running to fires. At all hours she could be seen racing along the streets and encouraging by her presence and voice the firemen in the discharge of their duties. At the time of her election she was about thirteen years of age, and was as pretty as a picture and as dainty as an English primrose. Everyone respected and everyone loved Lillie Hitchcock, but the fire company was a bad school for her young mind. She remained a member until the volunteer fire department was changed into a paid institution, when she retired. Some years later she married Howard Coit, the caller at the Stock Exchange. Upon his death she took a suite of rooms at the Palace Hotel, and it was in her apartments that a man who had been a colonel in the Southern army was shot and killed by a city official. When the case was called for trial Mrs. Coit, who was the only witness,

had disappeared. It was understood that she had gone to Europe. The culprit escaped punishment. The motive that impelled the tragedy was only a matter of surmise; but for a long time the gossips of San Francisco discussed the murder and the supposed cause that led to it quite freely.

Lillie Hitchcock-Coit's father was Dr. Hitchcock, a wealthy and reputable physician of San Francisco. He visited Victoria about 1867 to give evidence in a case concerning the estate of a deceased person. The deceased was named Isaac Humphreys. He was an eccentric man and was possessed of considerable means. He came to Victoria shortly after the close of the war between the North and South. He gave out that he was a Southerner and "put up" at the French hotel, which then stood on Government street, occupying part of the site now covered by David Spencer's great stores. Humphreys had a passion for wearing diamonds. His scarf-pin was valued at \$1,200, and the solitaire diamonds on his fingers must have been worth quite as much. He said little or nothing about his antecedents, except that he was a Southerner by birth and had fought in the war. He drank very little and talked a good deal about everything and everybody but himself. There was a mysterious air about the man. One evening he was taken suddenly ill and died in a few hours. When the undertaker was called it was found that his diamonds and ready money were gone, and although a vigorous search was instituted they were never found. As he left considerable personal and other property an advertisement calling for the heirs "in the matter of Isaac Humphreys" to come forward and prove their property, appeared for many months in the papers. This advertisement at last fell under the eye of Dr. Hitchcock, who came to Victoria and gave evidence which eventuated in the property being passed over to the rightful heirs of the dead man.

In 1852 granite and brick buildings began to take the place of wooden shacks at San Francisco. The first stone structure was built for Wells & Fargo's express. The blocks were shaped in China and shipped to San Francisco, where they were put together. They made a very substantial structure, which stood through all the changes and vicissitudes until the earthquake and fire of 1906, when it went down.

Vigilance committees there were several. Three "Sydney ducks," as escaped convicts from Australia, then a British penal colony, were called—were hanged on the streets by lynch law for robbery and murder. The rope that was attached to each man's neck was about two hundred feet long, and as many of the committee as could conveniently do so laid hold of the rope and with a "Pull all together, boys," hoisted the culprits in the air, where they dangled until dead. So great was the popular prejudice against Australians at the time that it was scarcely safe for a new arrival from the Antipodal colonies, however respectable, to acknowledge that he came from there; for he immediately became an object of suspicion, and was classed with the "ducks" until he could prove his respectability.

Lady Halle, the noted violinist, who has permanently settled in London, has met most of the distinguished musicians of the last half century, and doubtless she will have many interesting stories to tell of them in the book of reminiscences which she intends to publish some day. Sir Charles and Lady Halle once visited Bayreuth, and were walking with Wagner in his garden, when suddenly the composer turned to them, and cried: "This town is the art centre of the world; elsewhere music means nothing." Lady Halle said that she thought this a rather bold statement.

On another occasion an admirer of Wagner, having heard that his favorite composer was to be decorated by the King of Bavaria, and a similar honor was to be bestowed on Brahms, said: "Who is Brahms, that he should be decorated at the same time as Wagner? Does he supply the King with aqua vitae?" When the incident reached Brahms' ears, he laughed heartily, for he was a big-minded man, and wholly devoid of false pride.

Lady Halle possesses several rare violins, but never plays in public on any but the Stradivarius which was the joint gift of the Duke of Edinburgh, Lord Dudley and Lord Hardwicke in 1876.