

CALIFORNIA'S HISTORICAL ARTISTS

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California's historians owe a great deal to the artists who came west with the early explorers, or were drawn from all over the world with the hordes which moved in following James Marshall's discovery of gold at Coloma. To the men who made their sketches in the field, we are indebted for the only pictorial record of the region's early days.

Langsdorff's sketches, made in the Bay area in 1806, are probably the earliest to deal with the California scene. It is tragic that no artists accompanied Cabrille or Vizcaino, to take up the story at its very beginning -- and that the pictorial record of the La Perouse expedition appears, in its few West Coast scenes, to have been somewhat glorified.

Draftsmen who accompanied the various military surveys following the Mexican war have left us a few sketches and lithographs; the sketch of San Diego from Presidio Hill in 1850, by H. M. T. Powell, is an excellent example of the painstaking work of a man who was consciously drawing for posterity.

It is fortunate indeed that the vogue for abstract art did not precede the camera. While the ^{artistic merit} ~~quality~~ of the Gold Rush artists may, by modern standards, be open at times to question, there can be no question as to their sincerity or their desire to present a scene as it actually appeared. The well-known panoramic photograph of San Francisco Bay in 1850 probably is the first example of outdoor photography in California. This remarkable picture actually is a series of overlapping  which since have been re-processed onto paper. There are many who argue