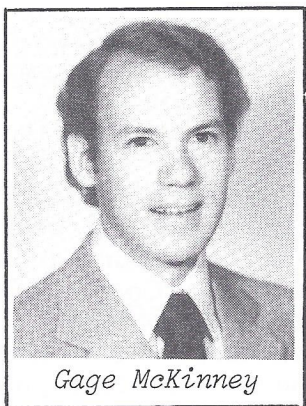


MINE HILL IN THE ANGLO-MEXICAN PERIOD



Gage McKinney

By Gage McKinney

(Editor's note: This is the concluding installment of Gage McKinney's essay "The First Cornish Miners at New Almaden," which won the Pioneers' essay contest in 1991. The 66-page essay has been summarized for THE TRAILBLAZER.

Though the Cornish arrived at New Almaden earlier than has generally been supposed, Mexican miners were the first skilled workers to carry their tools up the face of Mine Hill, the place where the shafts were dug and the miners lived. Throughout the life of the mine the Mexicans were more numerous than any other nationality, doing the bulk of the work and often taking the most dangerous jobs which the Cornish were unwilling to have. They too came from a great mining tradition that dates back to the discovery of silver in Mexico in 1521, and they invented metallurgical processes that were suited to mining precious metals in those parts of the world where fuel and water were in short supply. They had what Clyde Arbuckle refers to as "a nose for quicksilver," and their technologies might have been as advanced as the Cornish if it had not been for the political and social upheavals in their own country. As Dr. A. Cecil Todd has pointed out, the Mexicans had as much to teach the Cornish as the Cornish had to teach them.

The meeting of Hispanic and Cornish people at New Almaden was actually the continuation of a long relationship. Evidence suggests that there was trade

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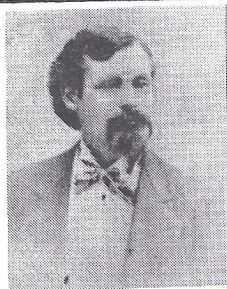
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between Spain and Cornwall before the time of Christ, and, since both Hispanic and Cornish people were drawn to the mineral-rich regions of the world, there are now people of mixed Hispanic and Cornish ancestry living in the copper country of Spain, the silver districts of Mexico and in the Santa Clara Valley (including my mother). In our own county Hicks Road, which runs the length of Guadalupe Canyon near the County Quicksilver Park, is a testimony to the mingling of the Cornish and the Hispanic as it was named for my ancestor, the Cornish miner Thomas Hicks, and his native Californian wife, Josefa Bernal Hicks, a descendant of some of our earliest Hispanic settlers.

During the mid-to-late-1850's, when the British firm of Barron, Forbes and Company of Tepic, Mexico, owned controlling interest in the operation, one could see Mexican and Cornish mining techniques side by side at New Almaden, carving their distinct signatures into the cinnabar hills. By 1857 a steam railroad extended 1800 feet into the mine, through a ten-foot square, heavily timbered archway, and was no doubt the work of the Cousin Jacks who had built tramroads in Cornwall and brought the innovation with them to the New World. At the same time 'tenateros' (ore carriers) were lifting cinnabar ore from the depths of the mine in 2000-pound leather bags ('talegos') that were strapped to their foreheads and rested on their shoulders and spines just as they had done for hundred of years in Mexico.

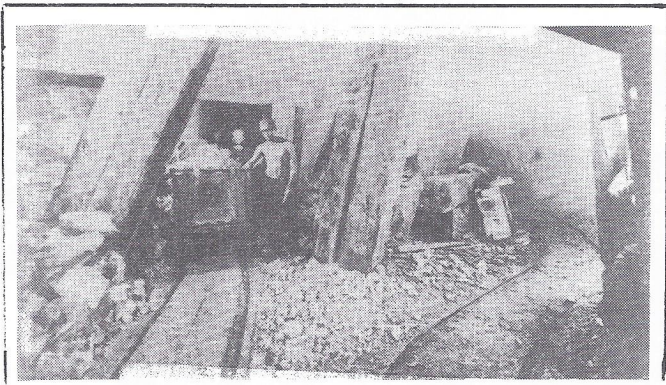
Deep within the mine Mexican miners followed ore deposits wherever they lead according to 'el sistema del rato', a pragmatic method of mining that created a chasm of intricate windings and labyrinthine passageways. The Cornish, on the other hand, pursued a pattern practice of digging test pits, boring holes, inserting charges of gunpowder, blasting, and then hoisting the loose rock

continued to page 3



Richard Hicks, who in the mid-1850's came directly from Redruth, Cornwall to New Almaden to join his older brothers at the quicksilver mine.

(Photo courtesy of the New Almaden Museum)



Miners beside an ore car underground at New Almaden

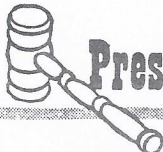
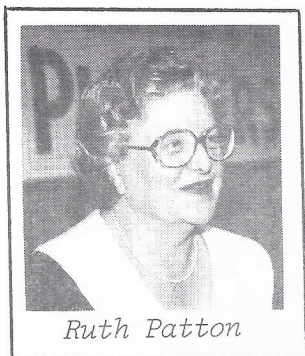
(Photo courtesy of the New Almaden Museum)

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to the surface in buckets or skips--and all followed by timbering and tulling. Compared to the Mexican practices these efficient methods, standard in Cornwall for generations, were revolutionary. In the short term, though, they were also more costly.

Some of the accounts of life on Mine Hill in this period emphasize primitive conditions and violence, though there is no particular reason to think that it was any more so than life in other Western mining camps. Despite the violence, there is evidence that the Mexican and Cornish got along well. Both groups were as prone to superstition as they were to religious fervor, and they shared a sense of the element of chance in mining, or as the Mexicans expressed it, "la mineria es una loteria." The Mexicans shared their colorful holidays with the Cornish, especially a great ball on the Saturday before Ash Wednesday when Cornish miners and señoritas danced together as the music played and egg shells filled with confetti were broken over the dancers heads.

Drawn out litigation over the title of the New Almaden property brought the operation to a halt late in 1858 and probably altered the demographics of Mine Hill. Not anticipating a lengthy controversy, many of the Mexicans remained in the settlement, but many of the Anglos, who were more able to find other employment, moved on. The four Hicks brothers from Redruth, Cornwall for example, took up placer mining in Tuolumne and worked in a gold mine at Soulsbyville. Some who left never returned, or did not return until steady employment was available again in 1864 when an American company took over the operation of the mine.



President's Message

It has been some time since you have been apprised of the activities of your Board of Directors. We do meet monthly and continue to do our best to keep this organization viable. Almost every individual Board member does a considerable amount of "work" in between Board meetings. This is necessary to keep things running as smoothly as possible. As President, I am aware of, and grateful for, their efforts.

Here are some examples of these continuing activities -- the keeping and auditing of financial records; ongoing negotiations concerning the Hacienda Cemetary; conducting the annual Historical Essay Contest; promoting, contributing to, and attending an Arbor Day tree planting ceremony; keeping our voluminous minutes in good order; editing THE TRAILBLAZER; taking care of our membership drives; and on and on. You, the members, should know that everyone on the Board is doing his or her best to serve you.

Our June luncheon meeting is the time when our annual Historical Essay Contest reaches its climax. The winners will be announced and prizes awarded. The top winners will tell us something about their essays. In the past this has proven to be an interesting meeting, and I hope many of you will attend. Please let the answering service know if you plan to attend.

JUNE LUNCHEON TO FEATURE WINNING ESSAYISTS



Helen MacCarthy is Archivist of the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County, and in that capacity, she chairs the Essay Contest Committee.

The California Pioneers of Santa Clara County have been sponsoring an annual essay contest since 1958. In the beginning there were two categories: one open to students and the other open to the general public. Each category offered a first prize \$200, a second prize of \$50. and a third prize of \$25. However, in 1987 it was decided that all contestants should be judged as one, thereby competing for a top prize of \$500, a second prize of \$250, a third prize of \$125, and three honorable mentions of \$25. each.

This brought interesting results. The first year the top prizes were won by the general public. However, in succeeding years, the students have garnered three second prizes and two third prizes. Essays may be on any subject relative to California history with a preference for history of Santa Clara Valley. The length should be between 3,000. and 10,000 words. We are gratified by the interest shown in the history of our valley.

At our June 6, luncheon, we will be announcing the winners of the 1992 contest. Several of the winners will be with us to share something about their essays and of their experiences. We anticipate a most interesting program.

TO CELEBRATE ARBOR DAY CALIFORNIA PIONEERS



In the beginning--- Before the work began



*Nancy Hill
filling hole with water*

On Saturday, April 25th several members of the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County gathered at the Slonaker Elementary School on Cunningham Avenue in San Jose to celebrate Arbor Day by planting a redwood tree. Richard Hill had located a beautiful specimen in a 15 gallon container for the occasion. This redwood tree matches another one in the area and makes a nice presentation.

OF SANTA CLARA COUNTY PLANT TREE APRIL 25TH

The Pioneers were joined by Irma E. Balderas, Principal of the Slonaker Elementary School, and Patricia Ramos, Community Coordinator of Project Crackdown, City of San Jose. Ray Duran, Jr., president of the local neighborhood group did a lot of the work and finished by putting in place the tree stake.



*Helen MacCarthy
filling in with dirt*

The tree is planted!



*Ruth Patton Sara Millar Helen Arbuckle
Richard Hill Mary Wahlberg Helen MacCarthy Clyde Arbuckle*

WHALE BLAZERS

JUNE, 1904 --- The widow of the late Robert Lewis Stevenson and their son, Lloyd Osborne, were among the enthusiastic of the San Francisco automobilists and were often seen on the park roads and ocean roadways. They also considered runs to San Jose in their White Steamer as nothing out of the ordinary while trips even to Del Monte added to their eventful get-aways. Mrs. Stevenson was classed as an expert autoist and manipulated the levers as would a veteran chauffeur.

APRIL, 1905 --- SAN JOSE. Folks at nearby Robertsville, just south of town, were protesting in regard to an additional saloon within fifty feet of Almaden and Branham Roads which they believed would entice hoodlumism to prevail causing folks who would be desirable residents to look elsewhere for home sites.

AUGUST, 1911 --- "Valuable Hints for Automobile Owners." "When filling the gas tank from a can which has been standing about for some time, be certain to wipe off the cork as well as the top of the can as the accumulation of dust will wash into the tank and be certain to stop-up the gas line. Also, funnels which have been hanging should be wiped well. Be mindful, also, when the car is washed, water tends to creep into the tire casings if the valve stem is not kept tight. This applies to the use of the auto on wet roads as well."

JANUARY 31, 1912 --- WASHINGTON, D.C. San Francisco was awarded the 1915 World's Fair by a vote of the House, 189 to 153.

SAN JOSE, 1913 --- Early in the fall some 150 trees from Oak Hill Cemetery were already marked for removal to San Francisco to be placed in position at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition grounds. The majority of the removals were said to be Italian Cypress with some magnolias and yew trees according to John F. O'Keefe, then superintendent of Oak Hill. Mr. John McLaren, superintendent of Golden Gate Park was in charge of the Panama-Pacific Exposition landscaping.

CANDID CAMERA



*Nancy Hill
who takes tour
reservations over
the telephone*



*Helen Brooks
Bookkeeper for the
touring program and
receives the money*



*Helen Arbuckle
will be on North Dakota Tour*

Welcome New Members

Marjorie P. Riedel
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June 14 - GRAND ISLAND SUNDAY BRUNCH in a unique setting on "Steamboat Slough" in California's Delta country. Dine in splendor in this prohibition era 58 room mansion, now listed on the California Register of Historical Houses. CALL NOW for reservations!

July 8-16 - YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK AND NORTH DAKOTA. LAST CALL! Make

reservations NOW for this visit to our first national park and the spectacular Teton park. See in addition, southwest North Dakota, south east Montana and central Wyoming.

November 7-14 - SONORAN DESERT WITH AUSTEN WARBURTON. Mark your calendar, get your roommate, bring your checkbook and be ready to sign up for this excursion into the southwest and Mexico at the June 6th Pioneers Luncheon.

Brochures with details are available by sending a stamped, self-addressed legal size envelope to:

THE CALIFORNIANS
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RESERVATIONS: Call NANCY HILL, (408) 258-3449, Monday thru Friday, preferably in the morning.

If you have yet to experience a tour with THE CALIFORNIANS, now is the time to try it! You're sure to like it!



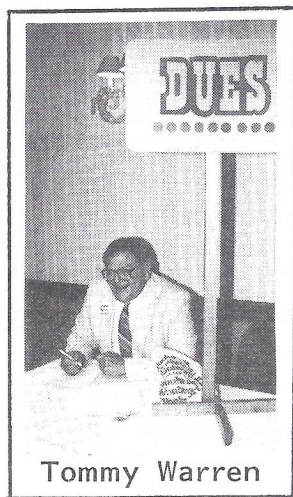
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Dues of \$7.00 are due and payable on January 1st of each year. So that you do not have to remember each year to pay your dues, consider a life membership category; \$75.00 for a single person or \$125.00 for a married couple. What a convenience.

Of a total of 982 members of the California Pioneers, 219 are Life Members. Why not join them?

If you still owe dues for 1992, you may pay by mail by sending your check along with a stamped self-addressed envelope to:

California Pioneers
P. O. Box 8208
San Jose, CA 95155



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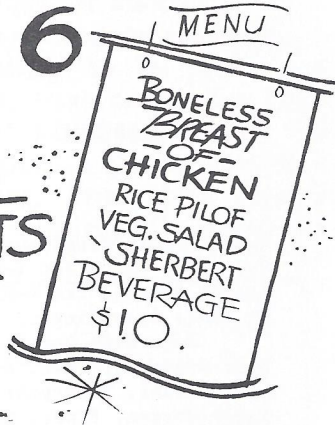
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