SHASTA—QUEEN CITY OF THE NORTH

Nestled in the foothills six miles west of Redding on Highway 299 lie the striking remains of the gold-rush era of a century ago. Brick buildings in varying stages of decay bear mute testimony to the lure of the precious metal. A visit to the Shasta Historical Monument and adjacent buildings is a return to the days of gleaming gold dust, shouting teamsters and wide-open Saturday nights, a reminder of the former glory of this city which once boasted the longest row of brick buildings of any California town and took pride in the millions of dollars worth of pay-dirt which came out of the mines that dotted the surrounding hills.

Shasta had its beginning as Reading's Springs in the spring of 1849. Pierson Reading, the intrepid pioneer of northern California, had found the first gold in the area in 1848. He has clear sailing to start with, taking out over $80,000 in gold dust in six weeks, until a group of Oregonians arrived to try their luck. These northern miners indicated to Reading that they were unaccustomed to competing against Indian labor such as Reading used. Their recommendation was worded in such a manner that the first Shastan immediately forsook the area, and as he commented: "I returned to my home where I have since remained in the enjoyment of the tranquil life of a farmer."

These original immigrants and the subsequent tide of settlers pitched their tents on the hillsides around Clear Creek, locating in many cases near the perpetual springs which provided the water necessary for living and mining. By the spring of 1849 their favorite camp had grown into a lively trading post which was designated Reading's Springs. The original tent city, marked by only one permanent structure and that a log cabin, was nearly eliminated by the winter rains of the north valley; many of the miners removing themselves to drier habitats to the south during the latter months of 1849. Those who remained prospered. This was especially true of a shrewd merchant named R. J. Walsh who purchased freely from the evacuating gold-seekers and held on to his merchandise until greater need brought inflated prices. Although selling flour he had obtained for 25¢ at $2.25 per pound, and a dozen boot tacks for $1.50, Walsh managed to acquire the reputation of a public benefactor by contributing to any and all humanitarian ventures and by providing destitute miners with provisions recompensed only by the assurance that they would pay when they "hit a strike."

By the spring of 1850 Reading's Springs had gained a degree of permanence with the erection of two frame buildings—the Trinity House and the St. Charles Hotel. Law and order based on the traditions of Spanish justice was inaugurated with the election of an alcalde. Dr. Ben Shurtleff, pioneer Shasta physician, was named to this office, thus given unlimited power over both civil and criminal disputes. The town received a permanent designation in June when the local populace got together in front of Walsh's store and decided to change Reading's Springs to Shasta.

A year later alcalde justice gave place to more typically American jurisprudence with the creation of a Court of Sessions. The first county election, held in September, 1850, saw the election of a predominantly Shasta City slate of county officers, and the location of the county seat, originally set at Reading's Rancho, summarily followed the swing of the political axis to Shasta in February, 1851. The first county election involves an incident dear to the hearts of local pioneers. The story centers around a lean, stoop-shouldered young man named A. Z. McCandless, who floated into town shortly after a slate of local nominees had been recommended for the previously mentioned election. Although a Shasta resident of impeccable character had declared himself a candidate for the Assembly, McCandless boldly presented a simple, but apparently persuasive, platform to the patrons of the leading Shasta saloon. "Boys, I'm a candidate for the Assembly myself. A. Z. McCandless is my name, and whiskey is my platform and whiskey is a goin' win this fight" was his pronouncement. True to the western legend, McCandless and his platform proved victorious, and in September, 1851, A. Z. rode southward as the first Shasta County representative in Sacramento.

Although American justice was undisputedly entrenched at Shasta during 1850, its early execution left much to be desired. A grand jury investigation of local problems in October, 1852, was presented in the *Alta California* of October 12, 1852. It reported that although there were

900 foreign miners in the region, including 300 Kanakas, 300 French, and an aggregate of 300 or more Germans, Scotch, Irish and English who should have been paying a $3.00 per head miner's tax per month totaling $10,800, only $234.90 had been collected. In addition, only one gaming license worth $175 had been sold, whereas $1,120 should have been the figure. No licenses for buying gold dust, for ten-pin alleys or billiard tables had been issued. The books of the county auditors did not conform to the law. The public roads were in shameful conditions, while the public jail was in such a state of insecurity that "unless a prisoner were heavily ironed, he could easily escape with one-half hour's labor." These wrongs were undoubtedly soon righted, however.

The balmiest days of Shasta's history were between the years 1850 and 1857. This was the era in which "Madeline," an early correspondent of the Shasta *Courier*, coined a new phrase which described the town's position. The "head of whoa navigation" it was called, the terminal point of wagon team navigation in the north. From Shasta the steep mountain trails leading to Weaverville, Yreka, Klamath River and other points north and west necessitated the tedious transportation of goods by pack mules. It was estimated that during this period more than 2,000 mules were constantly plying the roads between the city and the northern mines. In addition, the "Springs" or Shasta was the main trading point for the hundreds of miners in the surrounding area. As one old miner declared:

> The miners went thither from all the country around to get their flour, pork, coffee, tea, beans, sugar and dried apples, which were the only provisions obtainable. The prices for all of these articles save flour was $1 per pound and flour was worth $2.

By October, 1850, the town had some thirty stores, but only four or five families, and one-half dozen women. It was strictly a man's town; a place where the drivers and miners ate, drank, slept, and sometimes died. Bull, Baker and Company, the largest wholesale store in northern California, and the aforementioned R. J. Walsh were the pioneer merchants. Business and immigration went on at a rapid clip. Typical was an *Alta California* report in October, 1852, which asserted:

> Business in the last few weeks has been steadily on the increase and many of our merchants are making very large sales. The amount of goods hauled into town for the month is immense. The steady immigration that poured into this section, of course, contributed much to this pleasing state of affairs. Great numbers of miners from other portions of the state have also come into our mines.

In October, 1853, gold shipments averaged $100,000 per week and $5,000,000 over a period of one year. One entrepeneur averaged more than $10,000 per week receipts in gold dust. In fact, business was so good that one merchant declared he had sold over $3,000 worth of goods before breakfast on an especially good morning.

Besides its commercial development, Shasta was also evolving socially and religiously. The first Masonic Lodge in California, brought to the state by the enterprising Dane, Peter Lassen in 1848, was moved to Shasta in May, 1851. Important celebrations such as the Fourth of July in Shasta took place in 1850. Its story in brief is as follows:

> A man named Johnson, who, with his family came overland in 1849 . . . made preparations and had a successful celebration on the Fourth of July. With poles and brush he made an arbor adjoining his cabin and made temporary tables and seats out of borrowed lumber. The table was supplied with roast beef, boiled ham, light bread and pies made of dry Chili peaches . . . Secured from the top-most branch of a sturdy oak tree nearby, the American flag did honor the occasion. Maine in the far north and the newly-acquired state of Texas were represented. Citizens from the northwest states, Illinois and Missouri leading in numbers, were there, as were some Europeans, all dressed in the same garb.

Baseball, hay rides, horse racing, circuses, dance halls and numerous thirst emporiums were also part of the social picture. Theatrical troupes were also frequent diversions in this western metropolis. One such group in 1867 elicited the following enthusiastic report by the local paper:

> Last Friday night our citizens were favored with a theatrical performance by Miss Charlotte Crampton and troupe. After the regular performance, a play not in the bills was enacted by the company. The consumption of too much spirits resulted in a free fight in which the lady took a leading part and completely eclipsed the mimic combat portrayed in the 5th Act of Richard III. Oh! What a show!

That some of the activities went a bit beyond the recreation stage is further evidenced by this testimony of a Shastan written in 1856:

> Shasta is infested with a strong representation of suspicious characters . . . On nearly every Sabbath we have scrub-horse racing through Main Street, which creates no little excitement for the loafers and gentlemen of doubtful character . . . not infrequently three or four brutal fights come off.

In fact, even veteran frontiersman, General George C. Crook, as he reminesced about a trip through Shasta in 1853, declared in his *Autobiography*: "It was one of the liveliest places I had ever seen." The *Courier* of November 10, 1855, reported another fairly frequent social event of Shasta City. It declared:

> The largest crowd ever assembled in Shasta filled the streets to witness the hanging of E. A. Higgins, who killed his partner with an ax near Horsetown, for robbery, and threw the body in an old prospect hole and covered it with ashes.

The first organized church services were held in 1852 under the auspices of a Methodist preacher named John Hill. Hill won an immediate place in the annals of Shasta's history when he threw a drunken heckler off a hotel balcony because the bully had questioned the parson's right to use the street for the preaching of the Gospel. The Episcopalians and Catholics followed the Methodists, and by 1858 a Union Church, open to all denominations, was started.

Newspapers were transmitters of civilization in this western community. Three men named Dosh, Hinkley and Skillman started the Shasta *Courier* in 1852, while the *Republican* began operation in 1855. These were weeklies, consisting usually of four pages, devoted to world news and human interest stories on page one, brief articles of local interest on page two, and advertisements and public notices on pages three and four. Sometimes these ads were not bad reading. One *Courier* announcement which showed a bit of originality stated:

BLACKSMITHING DONE TO ORDER

If you want your smith-work done tip-top
Please give us a call at Tiffin's Shop,
Where we are always ready and never tarry
To work for Tom, Dick or Harry.
All who come and give us a job
Will find our motto not to rob,
But do our work up very nice
At a reasonable and low price
Shop in Shasta on the west side of Main Street
Above C. C. Bush one-hundred feet.

Another declared:

> The subscriber begs leave to inform the citizens of Shasta County that he has for the last thirty-one years continued to perform surgical operations on old boots and shoes by adding feet, making good the legs, binding the broken, healing the wounded, mending the constitution and supporting the body with a new sole. His fine Calf boots will be found as elastic as a California politician's conscience and admirably suited to those who tread in the paths of rectitude. Their durability is equal to truth itself and they fit the foot as finely as innocence does the face of childhood.

Included in this city's lengthy array of commercial establishments was even a facility to foster cleanliness among these rugged argonauts. Its advertisement stipulated:

CITY BATH HOUSE

The undersigned proprietor of the above establishment begs leave to call the attention of the public to his new and commodious:

BATHING ROOM

situated in the rear of the California Exchange and takes this method of informing them that nothing shall be wanting on his part that will conduce to the comfort of those who may favor him with a call. He is also prepared to give shower baths.

Single tickets - $1.00
15 Tickets - $10.00
30 Tickets - $16.00

HOT AND COLD BATHS AT ALL HOURS

S. Lean

Early day newspapermen were not persons to mince words, and the Shasta publisher was no exception. In later years, while introducing an editorial by his counterpart at Anderson, the editor of the *Courier* candidly termed it: "The Anderson Ass Brays." Remarks about his Redding rival were equally complimentary. Designating the Redding *Free-Press* the "Flea-Press," the Shasta journalist defended this title by asserting that the Redding paper was so named because: "of its want of consistency and disposition to suddenly jump and flip in any direction where there is a show to get a 'bite' at a nickel or even a free cold lunch."

During the decade of the 50's, Hall and Crandall stages were spinning into town daily from Sacramento and Marysville, while the Monroe-Baxter Company lines left from the St. Charles Hotel bound for Colusa and the river boat which would carry the mail southward from that point. In addition, Rhodes and Lusk's Shasta Express provided a direct connection with the Wells Fargo line leaving from Sacramento for San Francisco and thence to points east or on the continent.

During this era the Empire Hotel, offering board and room for $16 per week was built and the still-standing Masonic Hall was erected. Building was done on a more permanent basis after two major fires, one in 1852 and the other a year later.

Although both fires practically wiped out the city's business district, the town was rebuilt without a hitch in its schedule as evidenced by a statement by Judge Shurtleff regarding the 1853 fire. He declared:

> The buildings were built with yellow pine lumber lined with cotton cloth and were reduced to ashes in thirty-three minutes; there was no insurance. The people were young, energetic and hopeful. While the ruins were still smoldering, men were at work removing the debris, and lumber was ordered for rebuilding. Several large, fine buildings were erected.

A building that was used to capacity in Shasta was the new jail, built in 1854 on the hill above the east end of Main Street. One occupant of this house of correction left his mark on the town. His indictment, issued by the Shasta County Grand Jury in July, 1859, read as follows:

> The said Heiner Miller . . . one gelding horse of the value of $80, one saddle of the value of $15, and one bridle of the value of $5, of the property, goods and chattels of one Thomas Bass . . . did steal, drive and take away contrary to the statute in such case made and provided against the peace and dignity of the people of the State.

Heiner Miller proved to be none other than the famous poet of the Sierras, Joaquin Miller. This renowned bard was not to suffer the indignity of a common cell for long. An Indian maid, Miller's current inamorata, slipped him the necessary tools by which he was able to procure his release through a cell window. Possibly part of the poet's willingness to evade the law in such a fashion was based on his claim of false charges. He always vehemently denied that he had appropriated a horse, maintaining that it was only a mule he had taken.

Education was not neglected in this "Queen City" of the north. The first school, a semi-private institution with an initial enrollment of sixteen, was founded in 1853. After 1856, county school districts were set up and Shasta received her own public school. Segregation was practiced in the town, with the colored children relegated to a smaller building located on a street

away from the white school. The comments of a teacher in the Shasta school during the 1860's indicates a certain lack of modern educational facilities. All of the furniture was homemade, including the teacher's desk. The students, especially those who lacked the necessary powers of concentration, often spent much time in further embellishing their hand-hewed furniture. In front of the teacher's desk was a long bench upon which the pupils squirmed during sessions of recitation. Each year the pupils used the same text with the aim of probing into it more deeply with each succeeding term. Thus the initial phase of the year was always spent in review of previously covered material; a practice highly endorsed by this pioneer educator. Writing was done on erasable slates. Singing was much encouraged to facilitate learning, especially in the field of geography and with the multiplication tables. The teacher was paid $1 per month per pupil, a practice which undoubtedly tended to make her a recruiter, as well as a pedagogue.

During the early days of the 60's before concerted action by American miners resulted in their forcible removal from their mines, many of Shasta's inhabitants were Chinese. In fact an entire section of the city was devoted to Shasta's "Chinatown." These Chinese were distinguished by their rice mat style hats with a tiny crown surrounded by a wide drooping brim two feet in diameter. A short, loose kimona-like jacket, short trousers and American-style top boots completed their wardrobe. The orientals usually walked in single file, carrying goods on two bamboo baskets balanced on a pole on each shoulder. Besides their own residential area, the Chinese possessed their own cemetery in Shasta City. Religion played an integral part of the Chinese life in this western hamlet 4,000 miles from their homeland. At their most important gathering place in the city, the Joss House, the odorous perfume of incense rose continually heavenward while a statue of Buddha graced the entrance. Each home contained a shrine where incense was burned and worship made according to Oriental custom. The homes were rather bare except for several wooden beds with rice matting. In addition, the local Chinese possessed the distinction of their own opium den and also annually celebrated the Chinese New Year, often aided and abetted by numerous white celebrants who stood willing to help anyone celebrate anything.

By the early 60's the boom of the previous decade was receding. A statement by a scientist traveling through the city in 1862 intimates this: "Many are still mining here and many years will elapse before all the placers here will be exhausted." A Bancroft questionnaire from Isaac Boggs, Shasta lawyer, in March, 1862, revealed the following pertinent items:

> Population, January 1, 1862 - 2,000; votes at the last election - 426; four hotels, each charge 2.00 per day; five grocery stores; two general merchandise; four dry goods; two hardware stores; two banks; seven lawyers, four doctors; peculiarities, the bad road leading to town.

Four events turned the tide of prosperity away from the city of Shasta during the years before 1900. The first reverses occurred in 1857 and 1859 when new wagon roads were completed to Weaverville forty miles west over the mountains and north to Yreka. This ended Shasta's supremacy as an embarcation point for the scores of mule teams plying the trails to the northern diggings. The second death blow came in 1872 when officials of the Oregon and California railroad, pushing north toward Portland, decided that Shasta was too far west in the foothills to be used as a railroad connecting point. Thus the seniority of the city as a distributing point in Shasta County succumbed to the town which the railroad company would erect on the flat land near the river—Redding. The third factor was the disastrous fire of 1878. No longer was the town young, robust and easily rebuilt. The wealth from the diggings, which had tended to offset the losses from previous fires, had diminished to the point of being almost non-existent.

The final matter had to do with the removal of the county seat to Redding. Since the county government was a main source of Shasta City's income, this issue was not finished without a fight. The battle began in 1882 when Redding appealed for the county buildings, basing its plea on the contention that the old county residences at Shasta were too decrepit to use any longer and the county seat should be transferred to the main center of population and trade at Redding. In a heated vote marked by the entrance of Millville as a third contender, Shasta retained possession of county government in 1882. However, Redding was not through. In 1886 its efforts were resumed and in November Redding won an election to obtain the prize. The now desperate Shastans contested the election on a voting technicality and thus succeeded in temporarily restraining the removal of the county seat. When subsequent appeals to the Tehama County Superior Court

were decided in favor of Redding, the last ditch effort was made. In February, 1888, Shasta appealed her case to the State Supreme Court. On February 27th, the Sacramento *Union* announced this result:

> In November, 1886, over two-thirds of the voters of this county decided in favor of removing the county seat from Shasta to Redding. This removal was, however, obstructed and three trials have been held, one in the Superior Court of this county and two in the Superior Court of Tehama. All were decided in favor of Redding. The case was then carried to the Supreme Court and yesterday the news came from that tribunal that the judgment of the lower courts had been affirmed.

The decline of Shasta was accelerated after 1888. By World War I the Main Street of the once bustling gold town was deserted and the buildings were falling into ruin. However, in 1926 a retired Assemblyman, Roscoe Anderson of Redding, began a move to make the old town a state park. This effort was materially assisted by the Shasta Historical Society and Shasta benefactoress, Mae Helene Boggs. Their efforts bore fruit. In 1937 the town became part of the State Park Commission acquisition program. On the centennial anniversary of the county in June, 1950, the city was formally dedicated as a state historical monument. Today the sounds of voices and activity once again enliven the "Queen City" of the north—the voices of some 30,000 annual visitors who come to look in retrospect upon a page cut from the story of the building of California and the conquest of the western frontier.