

# THE OLD WEST

EARLY ANNALS OF DOWNIEVILLE AND VICINITY  
By One of the Earliest Settlers  
Number One

In 1860, a miner at Columbia, who had a natural bent for informal writing, was persuaded by the editor of the "Tuolumne Courier" to describe his gold rush adventures in Sierra County. This perceptive editor was one of the few of his day who recognized even at that early date the gold rush had been an event of the first magnitude, and that articulate participants should set down their memories whilst still fresh.

It is particularly unfortunate that we don't know the name, or, indeed, anything about this literary argonaut except what we can glean from his "Early Annals of Downieville and Vicinity." He styles himself simply as "One of the Earliest Settlers." We are tremendously grateful to him, however, as his is almost the only comprehensive account we have of the ridge area south of Downieville during the gold rush, and one of the few touching on the Downieville district itself.

The "Early Annals" are a veritable gold mine to the local historian, and for this reason we feel that they deserve reprinting in the Quarterly Bulletin of the Sierra County Historical Society. This first chapter of the "Annals" appeared very inconspicuously in the "Tuolumne Courier" on page two, under the title of "First Discovery of Gold, at Downieville." The frank and easy style of the "Annals" is most refreshing, and I am sure that our readers will look forward eagerly to later numbers of these interesting reminiscences--Wm. Pickiepoche

## FIRST DISCOVERY OF GOLD, AT DOWNIEVILLE

In the "Sierra Citizen" of April 21st, we find an article with the heading, giving the praise of the first discovery of gold at that camp to one Frank Anderson, now Post Master there. Not wishing to detract from the laurels of Mr. Anderson, but simply to correct him, the writer of this--himself one of the earliest settlers--begs respectfully to state that he is simply in error in supposing that he was the first in September 1849. As far back as the 19th of June, 1849, one Mr. Goodyear, who was then prospecting at Goodyear's Bar and creek with his Indians, went to the forks of the Yuba, in order to ascertain for himself whether the report of said

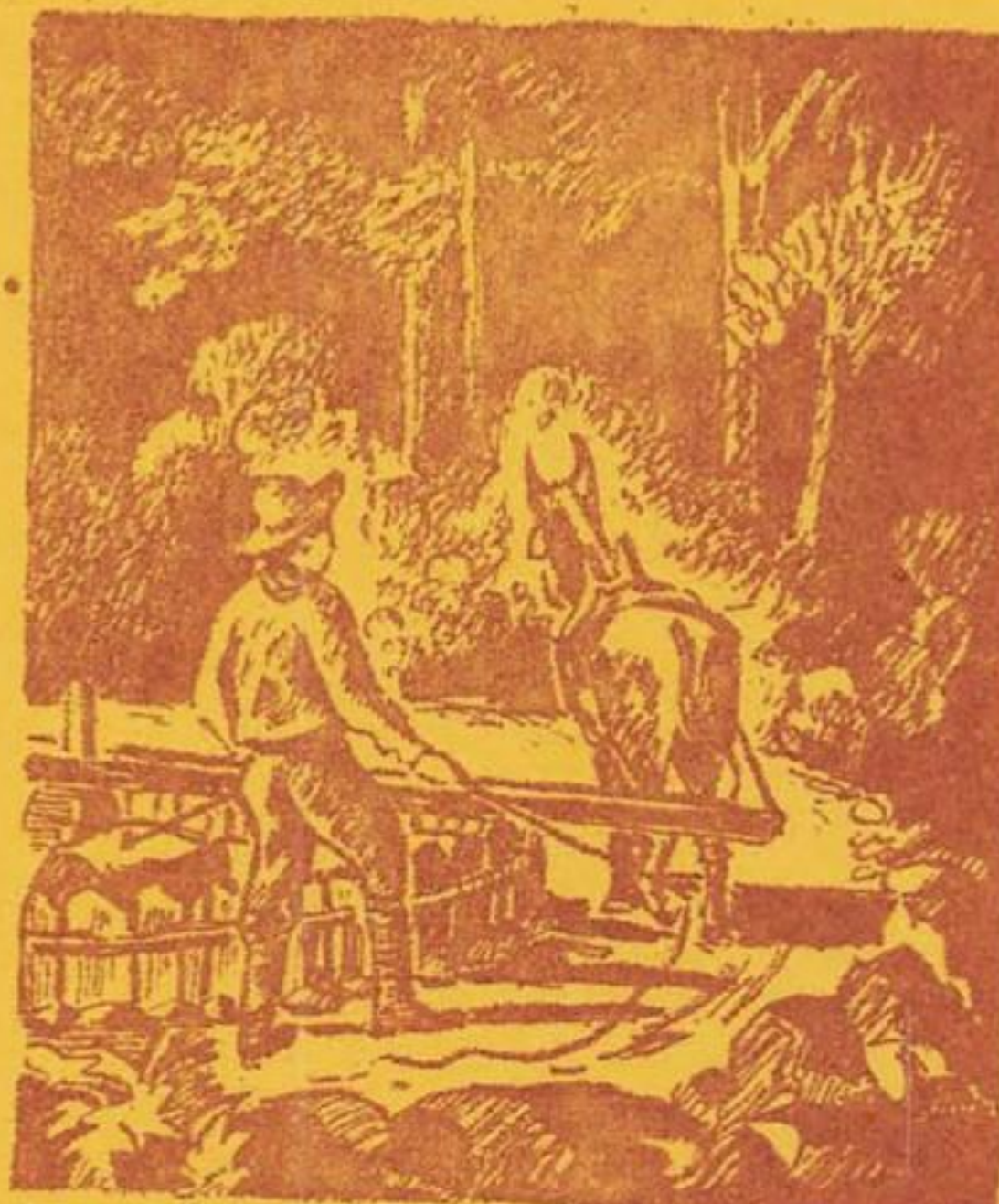


indians was true, that a short distance above it was far richer.

Having arrived there, he proceeded to pan out, and in ten pans got 17 pounds of gold, of a scaly character, but very heavy; the largest piece not weighing much over a dollar, with which he returned to camp. He occasionally sent his Indians up there, until Jack Smith, James Armstrong, Captain Devlin, Wm. Downie, Pepper Jack, Wm. Griffith, and Michael Devenny, and a negro, wandered as far as Goodyear's Bar.--I think there was another, but I have forgotten his name. Goodyear then desisted from his expeditions to the forks. This was in the latter end of July, 1849. Early in August, 1849, from what Goodyear had told them, they went on a prospect to the forks. Wm. Downie was the one who washed out the first pan, the result of which was ten ounces. Downie is now on Queen Charlotte's Island, British Columbia; and as yet his manuscript journals are in existence. Up to this time, "there was no white man, nor sign of one," any where above Goodyear's Bar.

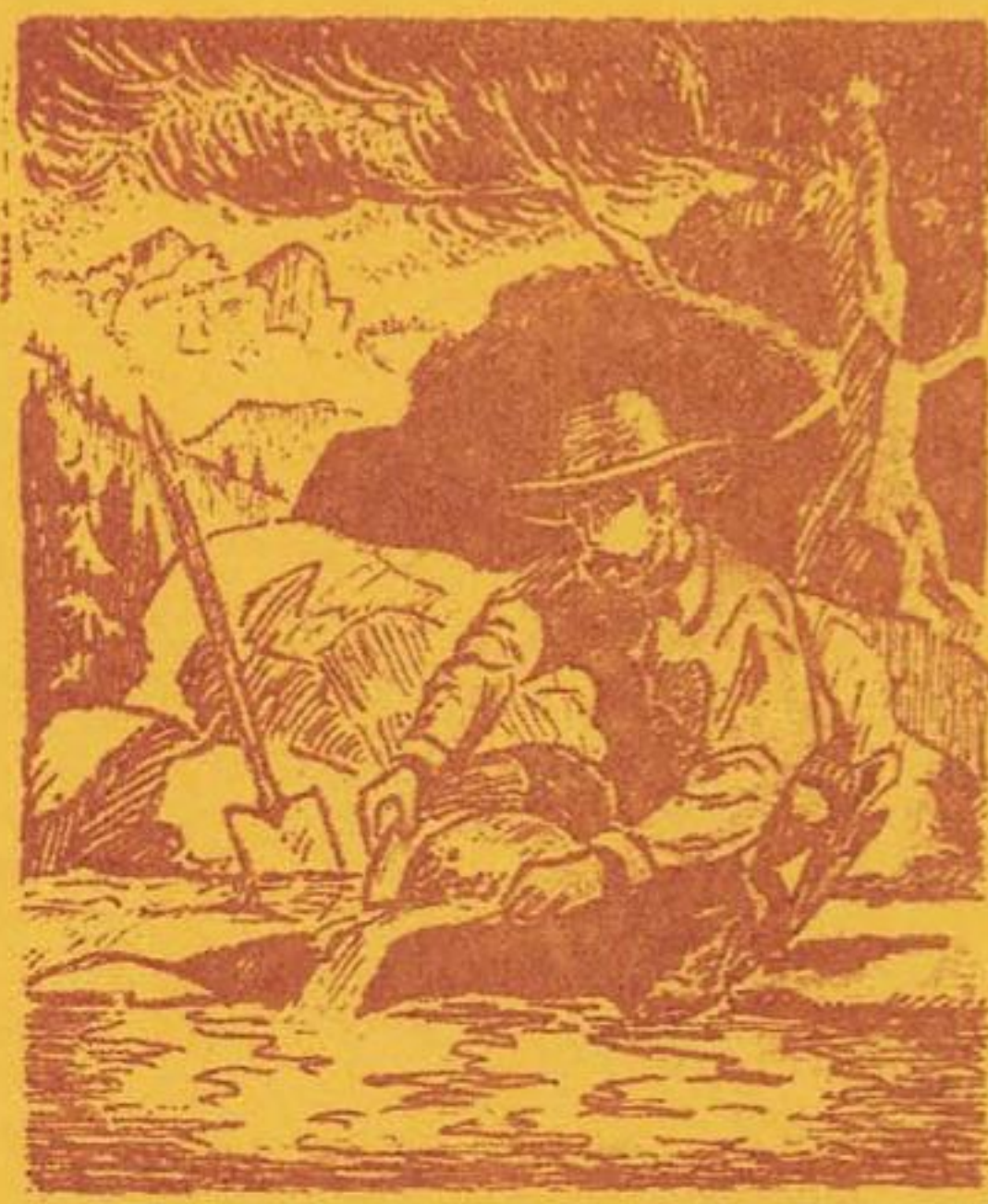
The writer of this has often seen and read these journals. Michael Devenny, then a boy, resides now--or did, three years ago--near Shasta. Griffiths is dead. James Armstrong went to sea again in 1852, and I don't know what became of him; nor of Jack Smith. Capt. Devlin died of delirium tremens in 1853. Pepper Jack was arrested on the Isthmus of Panama in 1853 or 1854, for an attempt to rob the treasure, crossing, and I believe was hung. The negro was, as late as 1857, working a tunnel on the South Fork, opposite Kanaka Bar. The first camp they made, was made of cloth tents, and was nearly where the upper end of the town now stands, and opposite to the Jersey Flat. In October 1849, Jack Smith commenced to build a log cabin on the upper and back end of the flat, and Downie's cabin--also log--was finished Christmas eve, 1849. Both these cabins were standing in 1857. On the 8th of January, 1850, they had a flood which nearly ruined them; sweeping off all their rockers.

On the 4th of July, 1850, the first man was whipped in Downieville publicly. His crime was stabbing his partner, in a fight; and was what was called a "Sydney Duck." In August 1850, the first man was buried. He was interred nearly in front of Downie's cabin, in an old hole along side of the ravine it was built on. He was employed at the time of his death as a watchman, to guard the gambler's money



The Approaching

17.



Gold Panning

at night. He was an Irishman, named John Williams, or Williamson, and came to this country from Rochester, N.Y., where he had wife and children. At the time of his death, he had about \$6,000, which was forwarded to his family; but I don't know if they got it, as no letter of acknowledgement was ever received from them.

In May 1850, one Captain Slater succeeded in gulling the people surrounding Downieville, out of "two" mule loads of gold dust, in this way: Giving out that he was going to San Francisco, and would take charge of any treasure entrusted to him, he accumulated the dust, took it down, but "forgot" to deliver it at its destination, and took it on East with him. Shortly after, the Eastern papers noticed his arrival, stating the amount

that Capt. S. had accumulated in a few months, and which he had himself, "with his own hands dug out of the Yuba river!" This was gravely told in the papers of the day, and this was the first intimation of his whereabouts that the denizens of Weaverville had. He was an Englishman, and got clear off with his gains.

In January 1850, Jim Crowe was discovered, by the Kanakas, by tracking Wm. Downie and Devenny--who had been to Cut-Eye Forter's Valley, to purchase provisions--and came in through the snow, that roundabout way, in order to mislead stragglers. Shortly afterwards, Kanaka Bar was discovered by the Kanakas, under Capt. Ross and Jim Crow, and about April or May, 1850, Kanaka Bar, at the mouth of French Ravine.

Having extended this longer than I intended, I close for the present; but may hereafter give more of the history of Downieville.

ONE OF THE EARLIEST SETTLERS.

Columbia, April 27th, 1860.

Our thanks to Wm. Pickiepoche for the above article. Notes on Mr. Pickiepoche can be found in previous articles. Mr. Pickiepoche intends to submit a series of articles similar to that above which deal with the early history of Downieville.