

**The inside story of the gold rush, by Jacques Antoine Moerenhout ... translated and edited from documents in the French archives by Abraham P. Nasatir, in collaboration with George Ezra Dane who wrote the introduction and conclusion**

Jacques Antoine Moerenhout (From a miniature in oils on ivory, possibly a self-portrait; lent by Mrs. J.A. Rickman, his great-granddaughter.)

THE INSIDE STORY THE GOLD RUSH

By JACQUES ANTOINE MOERENHOUT

*Consul of France at Monterey*

TRANSLATED AND EDITED FROM DOCUMENTS IN THE FRENCH ARCHIVES

BY ABRAHAM P. NASATIR

IN COLLABORATION WITH GEORGE EZRA DANE WHO WROTE

THE INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION

SPECIAL PUBLICATION

NUMBER EIGHT

CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SAN FRANCISCO

1935

Copyright 1935 by California Historical Society

Printed by Lawton R. Kennedy, San Francisco

I

## **PREFACE**

THE PUBLICATION COMMITTEE of the California Historical Society in reprinting that part of the correspondence of Jacques Antoine Moerenhout, which has to do with the conditions in California following the discovery of gold by James Wilson Marshall at Sutter's sawmill at Coloma, January 24, 1848, under the title of "The Inside Story of the Gold Rush," wishes to acknowledge its debt to Professor Abraham P. Nasatir whose exhaustive researches among French archives brought this hitherto unpublished material to light, and to Mr. George Ezra Dane who labored long and faithfully in preparing it for publication. In addition to their work of rendering strange and baffling expressions used at times by Moerenhout into understandable English, Mr. Dane has provided both an introduction and a conclusion to the reports of the alert French Consul to his government, thus giving the reader a satisfying setting or frame from which this eyewitness account of the Gold Rush stands forth in proper perspective.

DOUGLAS S. WATSON, *Chairman.*

III

## **INTRODUCTION**

THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH is fixed in the public mind as the outstanding event of that landmark year, 1849. The conception has passed into the language with the "Forty-niners," and cannot be dispelled by any amount of reiteration that Marshall saw the first fateful golden glitter in

the tailrace of Sutter's Mill on January 24, 1848, and that the excitement was soon intense with the Gold Rush well under way even before that year was out.

The public's conception is easily reconciled with the historical facts when we realize that the Gold Rush went through two distinct phases, measured by the time then required for communication and travel. The news spread through California in the spring and early summer of 1848, and nearly all able-bodied males then in "the country" swarmed to the mines in the summer and fall. This was California's local gold rush, the rush of 1848, the rush that skimmed the cream. These were the ones, these Californians, these "Forty-eighters," who, frequently with the aid of deluded Indians, actually did pick up fortunes in a few days or weeks. Theirs were the fabulous stories, often true enough at the time, that spread over seas and continents in the fall of '48 and brought about the unparalleled emigration from all parts of the world in '49. And that was the second phase, the world-wide gold rush, that made the year 1849 memorable in the history of the world as 1848 is in that of California.

The Forty-niners were almost as well supplied with pen and ink as with picks and pans, and the accounts they left of their hopes, hardships and disillusionments have kept the presses going ever since. But reliable contemporary accounts of the local rush of '48, of when and how the excitement spread through California and of what happened here during the first mad months, are surprisingly few, and of those few Moerenhout's recital is doubtless the most complete that we possess.

Colton was here, entering keen but rather desultory observations in his diary. Lieutenant Buffum was making note of the scenes that he later described. The Mormon boys, Smith and Bigler, wrote stilted diary entries of the history they saw in the making at Sutter's mill. Larkin, the former American consul, contributed some valuable but infrequent correspondence. The versatile Dr. Wierzbicki summarized and prophesied well, but gave no connected chronicle of events. It is eloquent of the paucity of material on this period that a book which competent authorities long considered one of the best accounts of '48 has turned out to be a monumental hoax.\* Even the

---

The inside story of the gold rush, by Jacques Antoine Moerenhout ... translated and edited from documents in the French archives by Abraham P. Nasatir, in collaboration with George Ezra Dane who wrote the introduction and conclusion <http://www.loc.gov/resource/calbk.018>

newspapers fail us. The *Californian* and the *Star* had hardly begun to take the discovery seriously when, abandoned alike by printers, publishers and readers, they suspended publication.\*

1. *Four Months Among the Gold Finders*, etc., by J. Tyrwhitt Brooks, London, 1849. Cited approvingly by Mr. Cowan, and quoted by Professor Coy and the redoubtable Mr. Bekeart, this literary fraud passed current for over eighty years until Mr. Watson recently called attention to the fact that Henry Vizetelly had confessed that he wrote it and that the trip to the gold mines was taken in his imagination after reading Frémont's narrative. Watson, Douglas S., "Spurious Californiana," *Cal. Hist. Soc. Quarterly*, Vol. XI, p. 65, Cf. Cowan, *Bibliography of the History of California*, etc., San Francisco, 1914, p. 25; Coy, *Gold Days*, Los Angeles, 1929, p. 91 (quoting, though not citing, "Brooks"); Bekeart, Philip B., "Previous Gold Discoveries," *Quarterly of the Soc. of Calif. Pioneers*, Vol. I, pp. 93-94.

The valid sources referred to in the above paragraph are: Colton, Walter, *Three Years in California*, N. Y. and Cincinnati, 1850; Buffum, E. G., *Six Months in the Gold Mines*, Philadelphia, 1850; Bekeart, Philip B., "James Wilson Marshall," *Quarterly of the Soc. of Calif. Pioneers*, Vol. I, pp. 31-42, where the diaries of Smith and Bigler are quoted; Larkin, Thos O., Letter to Buchanan, *30th Cong., 2d Sess., House Ex. Doc. No 1*, Washington, 1848-49; Wierzbicki, *California as It Is and as It May Be*, etc., S. F., 1849, reprinted, S. F., 1933.

2. The last words of the *California Star* were uttered on June 14, 1848, when it appeared "before the remnant of a reading community... with the material or immaterial information" that the publishers had "stopped the paper." The "boy editor," Edward Kemble, had also taken over the editing of the *Californian*, and in order to convince "what there is left of 'the public'" that it was not extinct, on June 2, in the triple character of editor, printer and devil, "compiled, set up, worked off, and circulated" an extra. There were further reminders that the *Californian* was still alive on July 15, August 14, and September 2, and its regular publication was resumed September 9. Wagner, H. R., *California Imprints*, Berkeley, 1922, pp. 2-3, 5-7.

#### IV

Colonel Mason, the military governor, was frantically writing for more money to pay the wages that were necessary to keep the whole government and military force from deserting to join the rush to the mines. His famous report of August 17, 1848, has up to the present been considered the most authentic account of the Gold Rush in its earliest stages. But the duties of the Governor's office

were many and pressing, and Mason could not allow himself more than three or four days in the mines, or more than half a dozen pages to report what he had seen there.\*

3. Mason, Col. R. B., to Adjutant General, Aug. 17, 1848. *31st Cong., 1st Sess., House Ex. Doc. No. 17*, pp. 528-36. The historical importance of this document derives not only from its record of events, but from the great influence which its wide publication exerted in starting the rush from "The States" and from Europe. The same may be said, to some extent, of Moerenhout's report. While it has never before been printed in full, excerpts from it are to be found in Ferry, Hypolite, *Description de la Nouvelle Californie* (Paris, 1850), pp. 106-7, 110-11, 115, 317-18, etc.; in Levy, Daniel, *Les Francais en Californie* (San Francisco, 1884), p. 15, etc., and probably in many other places.

There was one man in California at this time, however, selected and delegated for the very function of observing and reporting his observations. He was unoccupied by other affairs, a keen observer and a prolific writer, and his record, now published in its entirety for the first time, gives a contemporary picture and day-to-day account of the "Days of 'Forty-eight" which should contribute to bring that period into the prominence that it deserves.

This man was Jacques Antoine Moerenhout, consul of His Majesty the King of the French at Monterey. He had fought under Napoleon, traded in South America, been consul for the Netherlands in Valparaiso and for the United States in Tahiti, a highly favored courtier of the young Queen Pomaré and a negotiator for France in her acquisition of the Society Islands. He had written a book on his voyages in the South Seas that had earned and still commands the respect of geographers and historians. A skillful painter of miniatures, he had the artist's sharp perception, and was as deft with the pen as with the brush.

\*

4. See the biographical sketch in the Introduction to Part II of the French Consular Correspondence. *Calif. Hist. Soc. Quarterly*, Vol. XI I, No. 2, pp. 155-59. We understand that M. L. Jore, formerly Governor-General of the French possessions in Oceania, is engaged in writing a biography of Moerenhout.

Great events have a way of finding their own historians, and the Gold Rush found a worthy one in Moerenhout. Following his correspondence with "*Monsieur le Ministre*," "we learn of the quicksilver excitement, then hear the first rumours of the gold placer, too fabulous for belief; witness the astonishing proofs, and the spread of the "fever," first to the restless American immigrants, then to the normally apathetic Californians, until towns are depopulated, garrisons and

ships deserted, commerce is paralyzed, women and children are left alone on the ranchos, and crops left standing in the fields.

“Never, I think,” says the Consul, “has there been such excitement in any country of the world.” It is too much for him to withstand, and he also takes to the road now “crowded with people, with horses and with carriages.” He leaves Monterey on July 5, and returns to dispatch his report to Paris on August 17, the same date on which Mason sent his to Washington. Yet Mason, whose trip had lasted a month, was but three days at the mines, whereas Moerenhout, absent six weeks, was for at least two weeks touring the various diggings. No detail escaped him, and the diary which constitutes the body of his report is replete with description, character sketches, and accounts of adventure that make it a document truly of literary as well as historic value.

## V

The report of his trip to the mines runs to 118 pages in the copyist's neat hand, and is but one chapter in the continued story of his correspondence. This goes on through 1849, and includes the account of a second visit to the mines, in which the changes that a year has wrought are emphasized by contrast. Moerenhout's chronicle ends with his displacement by an appointee of the new French Republic, in 1850.

The Consul's story of the gold rush itself begins with his first mention, on May 15, 1848, of the discovery “of a gold placer . . . in the plain of the Sacramento near New Helvetia.” But to the drama of the gold rush there is a prologue, which sets the stage and clearly shows that there was already a great deal of excitement over the mineral riches of the country before Marshall had cut a timber for the sawmill at Coloma. There was coal near San Pablo Bay, silver at Alisal, a mountain of mercury at New Almaden. Gold had been mined at San Fernando since 1842<sup>\*</sup>, and many rumors ran of its existence elsewhere. The padres knew of it from the Indians, it was said, and there were tales of strange secret experiments that the priests had performed with quicksilver behind closed doors. It has even been told that one of them had little golden pellets which he gave as presents.<sup>\*</sup>

5. See Note 8, *infra*.

6. Pico, José de Jesus, *Acontecimientos*, MS in Bancroft Library, pp. 14-16.

To all of these reports the French Consul's ears were open, and he prophesied great developments for the future.

On March 21, 1847, so reports the Consul, died in the city of *Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles*, Charles Baric, native of Bordeaux, aged 33 to 34 years. \* So is recalled the first mining conducted on a commercial scale in California. For Baric it was who, in partnership with Francisco (“Chico”) Lopez, engaged in the exploitation of the gold placer discovered by Lopez in 1842 on the Del Valle rancho near San Fernando Mission. Engaging at low wages men of experience in the placers of Sonora, Baric and Lopez cleared several thousand dollars on the venture, and made what was probably the first shipment of bullion from California. \* Just how much they took out is not known, and estimates have varied from \$6,000 to \$100,000. Probably \$25,000 is a liberal estimate.

\* Baric's share, at any rate, did not last long. In reporting his death, the Consul says that his affairs were in a “deplorable state.” One of his associates, Louis Auguste Martin, had committed suicide.

The firm was bankrupt, with liabilities of some thirty thousand dollars. \*

7. Moerenhout to Minister, Sept. 25, 1847, and Jan. 1, 1848. See these documents (Nos. X and XI) in Calif. Hist..Soc. *Quarterly*, Vol. XII, pp. 352,354.

8. See Bekeart, Philip B., “Previous Gold Discoveries,” *Quarterly of Soc. of Calif. Pioneers*, Vol. I, pp. 90-92; Bancroft. *Hist. of Calif.*, IV, 296-97; Duflot de Mofras, *Exploration*, etc., I, 489. The earliest record of the discovery is in a letter from Manuel Requena to Alexander [?] Forbes, May 6, 1842, reporting that the discovery was made in March of that year. *Documentos para la Historia de California; Archivo de la Familia Requena*, pp. 4-5, MS in Bancroft Library.

9. Bekeart, *op. cit. supra*, at p. 92.

10. Moerenhout to Minister of Foreign Affairs, No. 9, Sept. 25, 1847, and No. 10, Jan. 1, 1848, Docs. X and XI in Calif. Hist. Soc. *Quarterly*, Vol. XII, pp. 352 and 354.

By this time the San Fernando placer was worked out, but a new mining excitement had arisen. Andres Castellero had located a veritable mountain of cinnabar near Santa Clara. It was wonderfully rich in quicksilver and bade fair to surpass the great Almaden mines in Spain, after which it had been named, “New Almaden.” It was in November, 1845, that Captain Castellero, up from Mexico on a secret mission, became interested in the vermilion earth that was being used to paint the Mission church at Santa Clara. On November 22 and December 3 of that year, he filed with Alcalde

VI Antonio Maria Pico the “denouncement” papers which were afterwards to be subjected to such fierce legal attack, and eventually held insufficient. \*

11. *The United States v. Andres Castillero*, 2 Black's Rep. 1 (U. S. Sup. Ct., 1862). The history of the mine is well reviewed and many documents are quoted in the statement of facts and opinions of the judges given in this report, with which is reprinted (pp. 214-371) the remarkably able opinion rendered by Judge Hoffman in the District Court. It is from this report that facts have been drawn to round out the data given by the French consuls.

They were good enough for the time being, however. In June, 1846, Moerenhout's predecessor, the Acting Consul Gasquet, in reporting the discovery, \* says that the exploitation of the mine has been commenced, “and the results which it has given. with very imperfect means, have surpassed the most favorable calculations.” Gasquet is “convinced that a well-directed exploitation ought to give magnificent and easily realized results because of the nearness of Mexico, which consumes so much quicksilver.” He thinks the mine could easily be purchased, and would like to see it pass into French hands. He urges the establishment of a French company, which he believes could make great profit out of mining in California.

12. Gasquet to Minister of Foreign Affairs, June 15, 1846, printed as Doc. XXI of the Gasquet Documents, Calif. Hist. Soc. *Quarterly*, Vol. XII, pp. 35-36.

Castillero, says Gasquet, left for Mexico April 4, 1846, on a government mission, and will probably take advantage of his sojourn there “to find a company which may furnish them capital and men,” but Gasquet predicts that he will have difficulty “because of the revolutions which are desolating Mexico and of the precarious situation of California.”

In fact, that enterprising Englishman, Alexander Forbes, of Barron, Forbes and Co. at Tepic, had already heard of the discovery, and was writing to James Alexander Forbes, the British Vice-Consul at Monterey, for further details. The latter promptly complied, and before the year was out, Alexander Forbes, through the mediation of the Vice-Consul and Father MacNamara, the intriguing Irish priest, had Castillero and the others interested with him signed up to an agreement by which capital and management were to be furnished by Barron, Forbes & Co. on terms very favorable to the latter. \*

13. The correspondence between Alexander Forbes and James Alexander Forbes is printed in the report of U. S. v. Castillero, *supra*, 2 Black's Rep. at pp. 55-81. It was of importance in that litigation as proof that documents

purporting to evidence confirmation of Castellero's claim by the central Mexican government were antedated and false. They were procured by Castellero under instructions from the Forbeses, after the latter became fearful that the original proceedings before Alcalde Pico were insufficient to establish the Castellero title.

Moerenhout reports the arrival at Monterey, on March 21, 1847, of the little English schooner *William*, bearing Robert Walkinshaw, agent for Barron, Forbes & Co., and a cargo the proceeds of which were intended to furnish capital for the New Almaden Mine. But here the promoters had a foretaste of the endless difficulties that they were destined to have with the American authorities.

The schooner and her cargo were seized and condemned as the property of residents of Mexico. \*

14. Moerenhout to Minister of Foreign Affairs, April 30, 1847, Doc. IX in Calif. Hist. Soc. *Quarterly*, Vol. XII, p. 349.

But this did not deter the enterprising Englishmen. \* They felt riches within their grasp. "By the new assays that have just been made at Santa Clara," Moerenhout reports, "it has been found that the production of this mine will far exceed the already unusually large amount announced at the time of the discovery, fourteen or fifteen months ago. The latest assays have given the extraordinary result of 35 per cent. of pure metal over the whole extent of a vein four varas (eleven French feet) wide, from the top to the foot of the mountain, and from 8 to 12 per cent. over a width of a thousand varas. The whole mountain seems in fact to be a mass of mercury." James Alexander Forbes, the English Consul, was living at Santa Clara. He had an VII interest in the mine, "and since he was instructed by the owners to commence operations in order to preserve their rights, he has extracted fifteen quintals of quicksilver in three months, by means of a whaler's try-pot."

15. They must have ironed out this particular difficulty, for Alexander Forbes, writing from Monterey to J. A. Forbes, Oct. 1, 1847, says "I . . . arrived last afternoon in the 'William' [at Monterey], where I have been kindly received by the authorities, and no difficulty of any kind thrown in my way," U. S. v. Castellero, *supra*, 2 Black's Rep. at p. 58.

One can understand with the Consul the chagrin of the Frenchmen who had rejected the offer of shares in this mine simply for lending their names and their presence to the enterprise at Santa Clara. \*

16. Moerenhout to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jan. 1, 1848, Doc. XI in Calif. Hist. Soc. *Quarterly*, Vol. XI I, p. 354.

On January 1, 1848, Moerenhout, surveying the commerce of California for the benefit of the Minister, sees but one hope for the future. "The mines of precious metals alone," he says, "seem to give promise of great results. Discoveries of those containing mercury are continually being made. Several situated in the vicinity of the one called Santa Clara [New Almaden] have been denounced." These are only small veins but very frequent and extremely rich. They yield 20 to 25 per cent. and lead to deposits of cinnabar which gives from 60 to 70 per cent. The ore taken from the Santa Clara mine in three months by seventeen workmen, should produce at least a thousand quintals of quicksilver, but up to this time the methods of distillation have been so crude that it has been necessary to suspend work and several workmen have been poisoned from breathing mercury fumes. \*

17. *Ibid.*

Again on March 15, 1848, the Consul reports to the Minister of Marine, that the only exports of any importance at present are hides and tallow, but to these there will soon be added, among other natural products, California's "immense riches in mines of quicksilver and other precious metals." \* Under the same date he addresses a detailed report on the mercury mines to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Still further discoveries have been made and "denounced" according to the Mexican procedure, but the Governor's decree of February 12 abrogating the Mexican laws on the subject, "has halted the Californians and even the foreigners in the enthusiasm of their prospecting for mines, the result of which would have been soon to make known a part of the immense riches which this country possesses in mines of mercury and precious metals." It might even, he believes, have led to the discovery of coal mines, so necessary to the development of the country, and which are known to exist, since one has just been discovered, of good quality, but too scattering to be worked with profit. \*

18. Moerenhout to Minister of Marine, March 15, 1848, Doc. XIII, in Calif. Hist. Soc. *Quarterly*, Vol. XI I, pp. 356-57.

19. Moerenhout to Minister of Foreign Affairs, March 15, 1848, Doc. XII, in Calif. Hist. Soc. *Quarterly*, Vol. XII, pp. 355-56.

The Consul evidently did not yet know of the discovery made by accident at Sutter's mill, the first published notice of which appeared in the *Californian* on the date of this letter, March 15, 1848. Governor Mason's decree, of which he speaks, was also causing trouble to Sutter in his efforts to secure for himself some rights to the American River placer, \* and the uncertainty in which it left the law was destined to have a far-reaching effect in forcing the miners to adopt their own regulations.

20. Sherman, William T., *Memoirs*, I, pp. 40-41.

Moerenhout for the moment is imbued with the quicksilver excitement. Several Californians, out of simple generosity, and to show their regard for France, have offered to share their new-found mineral fortunes with the VIII Consul. First Alvarado, the former governor, had offered him half of his already well-known Alisal silver mine, and similar offers have been made to him by Ignacio Soto and Pedro Chabollo, of shares in their quicksilver mines. James Alexander Forbes, the British Consul, was receiving and accepting such offers, and was very active in the profitable New Almaden. But, alas, it was forbidden for French consuls to engage in business, and the conscientious Moerenhout is uncertain what to do. He has finally decided to go to San José and to accept conditionally, or to ask the time necessary to submit the question to His Excellency, the Minister. \* The pathetic part of it is, that as a result of the February, 1848, revolution, Moerenhout was to be dismissed within a few weeks, \* but it was many months before the news of his dismissal could reach him, and the knocks of opportunity were not repeated. He might console himself, however, with the thought that the Soto and Chabollo mines were sour grapes, for the Governor's decree was rendered before they were “denounced.”

21. Moerenhout to Minister of Foreign Affairs, March 15, 1848, doc. cit., note 19, *supra*.

22. Notice of his dismissal was sent April 29, 1848, and was confirmed by letter of the Minister dated July 26, 1848, informing him that he was of course now free to engage in commerce if he wished.

After a trip to San José in January to survey the mines. Moerenhout was able to give precise details concerning them, and a list of nine which had thus far been discovered, “denounced” and to some extent proven. \*

23. These are:

(a) Santa Clara or New Almaden, belonging to Alexander Forbes, James Alexander Forbes and their associates. Moerenhout reports in March that in two or three tunnels opened there have been found three-foot veins of cinnabar, yielding ordinarily 25%, selected samples 35%, and some as much as 40%, 50% and even 70%. His May report describes in great detail the progress that has been made with the work of exploration. Most of the latter is summarized in the text.

(b) A mine described in the March report as two miles from the New Almaden, in the same mountain, with but slightly less favorable prospects, belonging to [James Alexander] Forbes, Suñol & Co. Vein 2 ft. wide, yield 15-20%. This would seem to be the same mine referred to as the “Santa Guadalupe” in the May report, which says that the working of this mine has already given good results. From 1850 to 1930 it yielded 109,340 flasks. Schuetke, C. N., *Quicksilver*, U. S. Dept. Commerce Bur. Min. Bull. No. 335, pp. 139-42.

(c) Abrigo, Record & Co., or Abrigo, Belden & Cook. Near the preceding, and called Santa Clara, though quite different and as yet very inferior to the original Santa Clara or New Almaden. In March the Consul reported a vein here of 10 in. to 1 ft. with a yield of 15-20% from selected specimens. But by May the Americans working here had lost the vein, and the workings were in part abandoned.

(d) Maximiliano Hernandez & Co., mentioned only in the March report. Little known as yet. Specimens show strips of very rich ore. A Frenchman, [the notorious] M. Cambuston, is interested.

(e) Ignacio Soto and “Don Diego” [J. A.] Forbes. Same type of ore as the preceding. Yield 12%. Size of vein still unknown in March. By May a shaft had been sunk which revealed very poor prospects.

(f) Ignacio Soto--a mine mentioned in the May report only, and apparently distinct from the preceding. This is the one in which Soto offered an interest to Moerenhout. The prospects are good,

but the claimants dare not do any work, on account of the Governor's decree, which was rendered before their “denouncement.”

(g) Pedro Chabollo--“Mines of Chabollo and of Narvaez”--situated in the hills of San Juan Bautista. Dark red ore. Exterior samples yield 12-20%. Chabollo not having “denounced” this mine until after the Governor's decree of February 12, he has been forbidden to work it. An interest in it was offered to Moerenhout, and on his refusal Chabollo took in Suñol and two Frenchmen, [Henri] Cambuston and [Pierre] Sainsevain. The two have fled a complaint with the Consul against the operation of the Governor's decree in their case, Chabollo's “denouncement” having been made after the date of the decree, but before it was published in San José. Moerenhout is going to put the claim forward, but “without the least hope of obtaining justice” because he had reason to suppose that it was the news of this discovery which provoked the decree. The claim was rejected.

(h) Antonio Maria Pico. Silver and mercury. Vein of 3 varas, 8 to 9 ft. wide. Said to contain much silver. The two Forbeses and Cambuston are interested in it. Not mentioned in May report.

(i) Manuel Diaz & Co. Value unknown. Not mentioned in May report.

(j) Francisco Soverano. Not mentioned in May report.

Moerenhout to Minister of Foreign Affairs, March 15, 1848, doc. cit., note 19,*supra*; Moerenhout to Minister of Foreign Affairs, May 15, 1848,*supra*.

So far the richest of these and the only one that had been worked was the New Almaden. Of the twenty-four shares into which it was divided, Alexander Forbes, British Consul at Tepic, had thirteen, and James Alexander Forbes, British Consul in California, two. The former also had the right to work it for eighteen or twenty years, in consideration of the payment of one-third of the net profit. proportionately, to the others interested.

Alexander Forbes, who came up from Tepic in November, was to return shortly, and from there planned to go to Europe to procure the necessary' machinery for distilling the mercury. The means

thus far used--try-pots from whaling ships--had proven inefficient and unsafe, although by mixing lime with the ore somewhat better results had been obtained. Yet despite the crudity of the methods, Alexander Forbes was able to take with him 320 iron flasks of mercury, worth at least \$40,000. This was the product of some three or four months' work, during which the eight or ten miners had accumulated enough ore to produce another thousand quintals of the metal.

Forbes was to leave an agent with authority to get options on all available claims. \* Since Forbes' firm was the only one in the field with sufficient capital and with the necessary iron flasks, it seemed probable that they would succeed in securing a virtual monopoly of the production and at very low prices. It was indeed "truly a colossal affair, this mine of Mr. Forbes!" \*

24. Moerenhout to Minister of Foreign Affairs, March 15, 1848, doc. cit., note 19, *supra*. This agent was probably Robert Walkinshaw, who, according to the Forbes correspondence, went over to the enemy and caused considerable concern by a legal proceeding drawing the Castellero title into question. See Forbes correspondence in *U. S. v. Castellero*, 2 Black's Rep., pp. 63-66, 70, 74, 75, 78.

25. Moerenhout to Minister of Foreign Affairs, March 15, 1848, doc. cit., n. 19, *supra*.

On May 15, 1848. Moerenhout was again at San José to visit the "mercury and coal mines recently discovered in this district." He had gathered samples of the various ores, which he was forwarding to his government.

The New Alamaden mine was fulfilling all hopes and expectations. "Situated on the summit of a mountain, 1300 feet above the beautiful valley where IX the furnaces have been built, it gives promise of an inexhaustible supply. The only disadvantage so far encountered is the difficulty of the roads. It costs from 15 to 16 francs per ton to transport the ore, which is cleaned and sorted near the mine, from the mountain to the place where it is distilled."

The tunnel had now been extended some two hundred feet into the mountain, and several drifts had been run out to explore the ore body, which was proven to be an immense mass. "In passing through *La Esperanza* Tunnel which crosses the principal vein, the walls on either side of one are of metal, the stairs on which one walks are of cinnabar, and the peak itself is simply a mass of the richest ore." Work was progressing in other quicksilver mines also, and some gave promise of great

richness. Several coal mines had also been discovered in the vicinity of San Jose.\* It is said also that other discoveries had been made, but the discoverers, “fearing to lose them on account of the Governor's decree of February 12, refuse to make them known.”

26. Moerenhout to Minister of For. Aff., May 15, 1848, doc. cit., n. 23,*supra*. These data on other quicksilver mines are combined with those given from the March letter in footnote 23,*supra*. Moerenhout refers to three coal mines, from which he sends samples. The best one, “denounced” by Don Joaquin Castro, is on a little hill at the foot of the Cuesta de Santa Cruz or Sierra Azul, three leagues from the Pueblo de San José. The strata are vertical, but extend in horizontally toward the center of the hill. Vein 3 or 4 ft. high by 1 ft. wide, revealed when work was stopped by the alcalde, and it is hoped that the vein will be found to widen. The other two mines mentioned will probably be too costly to work, for one is in a very hard rock, the other in very compact and adhesive clay.

Thus was established the existence of at least one source of vast mineral riches destined in eighty years to contribute \$110,000,000.00 to the wealth of California.\* The future of the conquered country had already begun to take on a different aspect. It was with good reason that the French consul prophesied the end of the pastoral era of hides and tallow, and the development of new industries--“Lumber, salmon fisheries, agricultural products, salt and dried meats,” but above all the “immense riches in mines of mercury and precious metals.”\* For now a new rumor was spreading, a new excitement was brewing.

27. California produced from 1850 to 1930, 2,323,218 flasks of quicksilver, of which 1,039,675 came from the New Almaden Mine. During the period 1851-58, the New Almaden alone was yielding about half of the world's production. See statistics and tables in Schuetke, C. N., *Quicksilver*, U. S. Dept. Com. Bur. Min. Bull. No. 335, pp. 139-42. The total value of quicksilver produced in California from 1850 to 1932 was \$114,458,934, which it is interesting to compare with the value of gold, \$1,864,236,082, produced in the same period, and of silver, \$57,072,612. Symons, H. H., *Calif. Mineral Production for 1932*, Calif. Dept. Nat. Res., Div. Min. Bull. 109, pp. 39, 46-9. The New Almaden was closed down in 1927, because the ore available was not rich enough to be worked with profit at the prices then prevailing. *26th Report of State Mineralogist*, Calif., State Bur. of Mines, 1930, pp. 29-30. See also Bradley, W. W., *Quicksilver Resources of Calif.*, Calif. State Min. Bur. Bull. No. 78, 1918, pp. 160 *et seq.*

28. Moerenhout to Minister of Marine, Mar. 15, 1848, doc. cit., n. 18,*supra*.

It is May of 1848. Moerenhout is writing from San José about the quicksilver mines. He does not wish to appear unduly credulous or to burden the Minister with fantastic tales, but the rumors from the American River are now too persistent to be ignored.

At this point begins the French Consul's Inside Story of the Gold Rush.

“WORKING IN CALIFORNIA” “Upon arrival in this privileged land all workers seize their tools and dig like mad; here rocks raised by the pick uncover golden ingots; there the revealed mineral sparkles or is massed; and each day like efforts produce like results, and every day the strong box's golden store increases.” Reproduced from one of a series of rare contemporary French prints (1849) by permission of The Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

## PART ONE

*In which Moerenhout advises the French Minister of Foreign Affairs of the discovery of gold at Coloma and of his journey of investigation. 1*

### DOCUMENT I \*

1. Box Monterey; Correspondence de M. Moerenhout, No. 12, Duplicata; received Feb. 12, 1850.

Pueblo de San José de Guadalupe

Monsieur le Ministre: May 15, 1848.

I cannot yet tell Your Excellency of [all] the many discoveries of mines of precious metals which have been made in all parts of Upper California, but especially in this district, where all other riches seem to be combined with those of agriculture; but the most important new discovery, and [the one] which just now is causing the most excitement, is that of a gold placer, which is found in the plain of the Sacramento near New Helvetia. This deposit or placer, it is said, is more than twenty leagues in length and of a considerable width. The gold is found in flakes ( *paillettes* ) in a sort of loose alluvial soil. This deposit is as rich as the richest placers of Sonora, in Mexico.

Being unable to go there myself to examine it, I have written to M. Sutter, the owner of New Helvetia, to ask him for some details of this discovery. The discovery of a platinum mine is also spoken of; but although this country may be rich in mines of precious metals, and the existence of the placer proven to me by the gold put in circulation, some reports which are being passed around

are certainly either false or exaggerated, and until I can myself go over the ground where these mines are, or until I receive reports from trustworthy persons, I believe that I should limit myself to informing Your Excellency that they have been claimed ( *dénoncées* ) and that it is probable that they exist.

2

## DOCUMENT II \*

1. Box Monterey, Correspondence de M. Moerenhout, No. 13, received Feb. 12, 1850.

Monterey,

Monsieur le Ministre: June 10, 1848.

Enclosed I have the honor of sending to Your Excellency the duplicate of my letter of May 15, from Pueblo de San José. In that letter I mention the discovery of a placer or deposit of gold which had just been found in the Sacramento valley near the river of the same name. Far from belying the reports which were circulating about the time that I had the honor of writing to Your Excellency from the Pueblo of San José, this discovery seems on the contrary to be surpassing all that was said of it then. Since several people have subsequently come from the place with quantities of gold, very large in proportion to the few days that they had worked there, the proofs are too positive now to leave any doubt as to the extreme richness of this deposit. Some of those who worked there have made three to five hundred francs per day, but it seems that the usual product of a day's work is from thirty to fifty francs.

At the time of my departure from Pueblo de San José, the 20th of May last, more than two-thirds of the Americans and other foreigners living in the port of Yerba Buena had left it to go to the Sacramento; of fifty volunteers of the garrison, thirty-four had just deserted, [taking] with [them their] arms and equipment; all the ships in the port had lost their crews; and there was not a workman left to perform the slightest task.

This movement which began first at Sonoma and Yerba Buena, situated nearer to the Sacramento, now seems to be spreading gradually, like a contagion, over the whole country. At the Pueblo de San José all the foreigners are preparing to leave. When I passed through Santa Cruz, I found not an American left. The Frenchmen established there were also about to go, and the saw-mills where they were working had stopped for lack of labor. At Monterey the emigration has been smaller and less general. However, all the Americans who were not detained by quite important business affairs have gone, and others are preparing to follow them, and this place, like all the others, will soon find itself without a workman and almost without a foreigner.

One remarkable thing is that this movement has up to now been confined to the Americans and the other foreigners, because except for a few Sonorans here, who are experienced and know the method of washing the sands and auriferous soil, hardly a Mexican or Californian has yet left, either from ordinary curiosity, as in the case of some foreigners, or to profit from the riches which are scattered in such profusion at such a little distance. And for that matter, this discovery has indeed furnished an excellent occasion for judging well the great difference that there is between the characters of the two races, the Anglo-American and the Spanish descendants of this continent. The former, quick to decide, with almost nomadic habits, and dominated by a single passion, that of enriching himself, as in the present case, abandons home and interests or disposes of them as he can and, taking only the bare necessities, leaves with wives [ *sic* ] and children for an unknown place where he and his family will be exposed to a thousand privations and sufferings, but where he hopes to find wherewithal to satisfy his ambition, change his social position and assist in the execution of his projects for the future. The Californian on the other hand, calm in the midst of the general excitement, continues his even train of life, awaits further news, and though he be poor and in need, seems still quite undecided whether he, too, really should go to gather a little of this gold which he desires as much as anyone and which it makes him jealous and angry to see fall into the hands of foreigners. But despite this apathy and the charm which this careless and vagabond life, which they nearly all lead, seems to have for them, it is probable that when they see the gold in circulation they will likewise bestir themselves. It is even feared that the very Indians will catch the

excitement and that soon farmers will be without help and families without servants and that the lack of hands will make it impossible to gather the harvest which is so promising this year.

In my last [dispatch] I said to Your Excellency that according to the reports in circulation this deposit was about twenty leagues long over a considerable width. This report seems also to be confirmed. Its location is between the Sacramento and one of its tributaries, the American River, and it extends eastward to near the Sierra Nevada. The gold, mixed with particles or grains of platinum, is found sprinkled throughout a sort of sand underneath a shallow layer of vegetable soil. The layer of sand or loose soil in which these metals are found is several metres thick and has a layer of clay as its base, and it is near this that the largest quantity of gold and platinum is found. These metals are found in flakes (*paillettes*) and in grains. Some of the grains weigh as much as two and three ounces. I do not know what its fineness is, but it is received in trade at Yerba Buena, at the rate of fourteen dollars an ounce. The price of platinum has not yet been fixed.

It is probable that this discovery will turn aside the storm which again seemed to be threatening the country, for [with] the Americans abandoning the places where their presence and their actions were beginning to cause so much discontent, and the Californians finding themselves more or less occupied by this discovery and by so many others that are being made daily, it is probable that soon both will be thinking only of their affairs and their private interests and that the country will remain quiet.

The commerce of this country is altogether paralyzed. Cash being absolutely lacking, nothing is bought or sold, but it is hoped that some ships of the American fleet will soon return from Mazatlan, and that the money which they will put into circulation, as well as the placer gold which is already beginning to appear, may revive business a bit. Just now the construction of houses and other buildings is suspended for lack of resources and workmen.

I have the honor of being, with the deepest respect,

Your Excellency's very humble and very obedient servant,

J.A. MOERENHOUT,

The Consul of France.

DOCUMENT III \*

1. Box Monterey, Correspondence de M. Moerenhout, No. 15.

Monterey,

Monsieur le Ministre:

August 17, 1848.

By the letter which I had the honor of sending you from the Pueblo de San José on the fourteenth of this month \* I informed Your Excellency that out of a desire to be able to give you some exact details concerning the discoveries of auriferous lands recently made in this country, I had gone there myself in order to examine the various localities from which gold is now being taken and to let you know as soon as possible the present state of the workings, their production and the importance of these discoveries.

2. Letter dated August 14, 1848, not located.

I left Monterey the fifth of July, accompanied by three Frenchmen, Joseph La Bourdire, Pierre Leguere and ---- Pipi, and by a California Indian servant of mine. In two days we reached the Pueblo de San José, twenty-nine or thirty leagues distant from Monterey. There another Frenchman, Arnaud Maubé, \* and two Californians joined us; but as I was advised in view of the length and the difficulties of the journey, to carry provisions for three weeks at least, I found it necessary to buy two pack-horses. These added preparations caused us to lose four days, and it was not until the eleventh towards noon that we left the Pueblo de San José.

3. See Bancroft IV, 400, 637; V, 615.

During this short stay at the Pueblo, I was struck by the changes that had been wrought in the spirit of the inhabitants since my last visit on the fifteenth of May. At that time several Americans had left for the gold regions, abandoning homes and crops, and almost all the other foreigners living there and in the vicinity were preparing to follow them. But the Californians, so difficult to excite and doubtful of the importance of this discovery or believing the reports then in circulation highly exaggerated, still showed much indifference and seemed not to care to go. Whereas today, out of the five hundred men comprised in the Pueblo and in the farms for several leagues around, hardly thirty or forty remain. All have left for the placer and the few who are still there speak of going, too. Never, I think, has there been such excitement in any country of the world. Everywhere the women have been left alone, even in the most isolated farms, for the Indians too are either taken by their masters or go by themselves to search for gold, and this ferment, far from diminishing, continues to increase and to spread. The 5 roads are crowded with people, with horses and with carriages. At the Pueblo of San José, which due to its situation has become as it were the center of all this excitement, there reigns such a stir and activity as to make one believe that he is no longer in the same country nor among the same people, and that in two months both have changed their nature and condition.

Having started ahead of my companions, I waited for them at the Mission de San José five leagues from the Pueblo; but they did not arrive at the Mission until about five o'clock in the evening, having been held back by trouble with the pack-horses, and we were able to go only as far as the opening of a plain situated two leagues east-northeast of the Mission and known by the name of *llanito*, little plain. This plain or valley is formed by the central range, which, just above the Mission de San José divides into two branches, one of which goes to the northwest toward *San Paublo* [San Pablo Bay] and Carquinez Strait, and the other to the north-northwest toward *Sushun* [Suisun] Bay, one of the principal divisions of the Bay of San Francisco.

As we were leaving the Mission we met Colonel Mason, Governor of California, who had just visited a part of the gold regions. He was returning amazed, and assured me that the reality far surpassed all reports which had been made to him and [indeed] all reports in circulation.

Wishing more particularly to inform Your Excellency concerning the discovery of the auriferous lands, I have not paused to describe the country from Monterey to the Pueblo de San José, or to the place where we stopped this day, but I believe that in order to point out among other advantages what facilities this country offers for communication by land, I should call to your attention that in going from Monterey to the Pueblo de San José, following the so-called *Toro* [creek] road from the port to the *Plaine de la Nation* [Rancho Nacional] a distance of four leagues and then going from this plain to that of San Juan by way of the *Cañada* or *vallon* of San Miguel [San Miguel canyon] along the banks of the *Pagaro* [Pajaro] river and continuing from there [by] the highway which crosses this beautiful and fertile plain, one has an easy and perfectly even route from Monterey to the Pueblo, which, if it were desired to build a railway over it, would require hardly any grading. It is the same again to go from the Pueblo de San José to Yerba Buena on the one hand, or on the other to *San Paulo* [San Pablo Bay] and to Carquinez Strait and *Sushun* [Suisun] Bay, for the San Juan plain extending as it does from eighteen to twenty leagues along the southwest and northeast sides of the bay of San Francisco and communicating with the *llanito* valley where we are now by an easy and nearly level pass known as *paso de los corralitos*, one may go through the *llanito* valley to the strait or to *Suihun* Bay by an easy even road. This linking of waterways with highways, that is to say, the roads from Monterey and the Pueblo [de San José] with the Bay of San Francisco [and] the San Joaquin and Sacramento 6 rivers, provides an open, well defined route from the capital to the northern extremity of the country.

*July 12th*

We started again at daybreak. A little way from the place where we had passed the night the road forks. One branch goes in a northwesterly direction to the Strait and the Sacramento, the other leads in an east-northeasterly direction to the crossing of the San Joaquin River. The two are now perfectly well defined, for they both lead to the gold country. We took the one to the east-northeast, for despite the difficulties of crossing the San Joaquin River in this season, our Californians positively refused to go by way of the Strait, and perhaps with reason, as since ferries have been established there several accidents have occurred.

Having been delayed again by several incidents we were today only able to reach a place called *Los positos*,<sup>\*</sup> which forms as it were the eastern edge of this valley, five or six leagues from the place where we had passed the night. There again we met several travelers, for besides the excellent water, there is abundant pasturage there also, things which I am assured are not to be found from there to the San Joaquin River, a distance of seven or eight leagues.

#### 4. Livermore's Rancho.

*July 13th*

This morning, leaving our camp and the pretty valley which we had just crossed, we entered almost immediately into a dismal and dry country, the sterility of which increases as we advance through the hills toward the mountains, which unlike those of the northwest side of the valley seemed to me to be entirely composed of a dry and sandy soil, little suited to vegetation and apparently quite rarely watered, for nowhere did I see any deep ravines or any indication of ravages made by water in the rainy season.

To enter from this valley into the *Tulares* or San Joaquin plain there is an easy route called the *San Gonsalo* or *Gonsado* pass, which I wished to reconnoiter; but my Californian companions, impatient to reach the placer, decided to take a route more direct but also more difficult and even dangerous, especially for the pack-horses. However, after an hour and a half of toil, reaching the top of the mountains, we had the satisfaction of getting a magnificent view of the plain through which the San Joaquin River runs and which extends with it as far as the eye can see to the north and to the south. It is also of considerable width and is bounded on the east by the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

While the descent was no less difficult or dangerous than the ascent had been, it happily was not so long. Coming again into a sort of dale, we were diverted in turn by the sight of several antelope, of *coyotes*, a variety of large fox, and an enormous bear, which was coming down a mountain and heading toward us. When he saw us he stopped, as though uncertain, but turning quickly he ran away in another direction.

On coming out of the mountains we met with another company of travelers. They had taken the cartway which is not a bit longer than the way we had taken and, having no steep hills, has the advantage of being much less tiresome for the horses.

From these mountains to the river, a distance of about three to four leagues, the land seemed to me the same thin and sandy soil found on the mountain, which produces little pasturage and does not seem at all appropriate to agriculture. But as the plain slopes imperceptibly, the soil seems to improve approaching the river. Reaching the first spot where there was water we found that instead of the river it was only a large pond, that the river flowed a half league to the east, that it was impossible to approach it at this point [and] that we had to go at least three leagues more to reach the crossing where there is a boat.

The San Joaquin overflows every year while the snow is melting in the high mountains. By the month of May it floods the country for a half league or a league on each bank, and when it returns to its bed toward the middle of July it leaves lagoons and swamps on all sides and very dangerous *atascaderos* or sloughs which in many places absolutely prevent approaching it. Thus we found that we had to go back as far as three or four leagues to the south, but the way was fine and there was pasturage and water for the horses. As we went on through these beautiful meadows, or the part that is flooded by the river, we saw a herd of several hundred deer, which seemed to be grazing peacefully along the flood lands. After some time when we had them between us and the lagoons, two Indians who were accompanying the travelers whom we had met on coming out of the mountains, unable to resist the temptation to chase them, rushed into the midst of the herd and already had cornered three or four which had become separated from the herd when the horse of the nearer one fell with his rider. Not only did this accident cause the abandonment of the hunt, but, the Indian having dislocated his shoulder, we lost some time and had to leave our new traveling companions. As we continued on our way we saw several other herds of deer, of wild horses and a large number of antelope, but [these last] in herds of four or six at the most, and this pretty agile quadruped, though very numerous in this plain, seems never to gather in large numbers. It is the only animal which the Californians confess that they cannot catch on horseback.

It was after three o'clock in the afternoon when we arrived opposite the river crossing, where a boat is, but to approach it there were more ponds, swamps and sloughs, very difficult and very dangerous to cross, but it had to be done for there was no other way. It even became necessary to hasten as from all appearances it was going to be a slow process, and it would have been dangerous to be caught by night in the midst of these quagmires. 8 The first of these places had about three feet of water, but the bottom was solid and we crossed it without difficulty. The second was a slough more than fifty meters long where one went at random ( *au hazard* ). Several oxen had perished there and one of our horses came near being stuck in it. But it also we crossed without accident. The third was a little lake. There we were lucky enough to find a *balsa* of tules or an immense bundle of reeds or bullrushes tied together, on which we took over our saddles, our baggage and ourselves. The horses were forced into the water and swam across. After this lagoon we still had [to pass over] several more very difficult sloughs in which animals which had perished there were to be seen all about. We crossed them all safely. In one only, one of the Frenchmen found himself so mired that the Californians were about to throw him a lasso when his horse, which was good, made another effort, found support, and jumping to hard ground, got free of this bad crossing. It was six o'clock in the evening when we came to the river at the spot where as I have said there is a boat.

The San Joaquin River, joining the Sacramento River at its very mouth, falls with it into *Sushem* [Suisun] or San Francisco Bay. It has its source in the Sierra Nevada mountains fifty miles to the south. This river is navigable by rowboats and small sloops in any season as far as four or five leagues from its mouth, and from April to the end of August ships of a hundred tons could go up it for thirty leagues into the interior. But toward the end of September it becomes fordable at several points and as the rains which sink into the sandy soil of this immense plain or condense [into snow] in the high mountains, affect it but little, it is only at the time of melting snows, from March to June, that, as said above, it swells so as to submerge all the lowlands for a league on either side. When it has returned to its bed its aspect is charming, and as it is perfectly safe ( *saine* ) it can be useful for inland navigation during at least five months of the year.

Formerly the crossing of the San Joaquin was rarely undertaken between the first of May and the end of June, although [it is] comparatively easy, for all the lowlands being then submerged, men could cross on the tule *balsas* which the Indians know how to handle, and horses were swum across, choosing the narrowest places, and it even happened in very urgent cases that lone men might cross this way. But from the first of July to the fifteenth of August the crossing was considered impracticable even for horsemen on account of the swamps and quagmires. This year, however, the thirst for gold has made [men] surmount all obstacles and brave all dangers, and the boats at Carquinez Strait not having been able to carry over quickly enough the many travelers who presented themselves with horses, wagons and merchandise, quite a number turned back and by the first of July went to the San Joaquin where, despite the labor of unloading the wagons at every dangerous place, and of having to take the goods across on their own backs ( *à dos d'homme*) or on planks and big pieces of wood, and notwithstanding

From Hypolite Ferry's *Description de la nouvelle Californie*, Paris, 1850. (Note the sign of Mercury designating New Almaden.)

9 the great number of horses and cattle which perished in the quagmires and that two men drowned in the pools in the midst of the swamps, people have continued to betake themselves there. We found there seven or eight wagons (*voitures*), a considerable quantity of merchandise, horses, cattle and more than fifty men waiting their turn to cross the river; for under a regulation established by the travelers themselves, each is to cross, together with his effects and his animals, in the order of the time of his arrival.

When we arrived the river had returned to its bed and might have been three to four hundred meters in width, but as its current was quite strong, the boat was each time carried quite a distance [downstream] and could only with difficulty be brought back, which rendered the passage of so many people and effects very slow. In all probability our turn would not come until after three or four hours of waiting, which was all the more disagreeable from the fact that this place is very unhealthful and that one is in a continual torture on account of the mosquitoes which attack you in swarms, and as all who were there assured us, allow you no repose day or night. Determined not

to submit myself to this torment or to lose so much time, even if we should have to cross on tule *balsas*, I went to see the men who were putting over their goods, and whom I knew, to ask them if after they had quit working they would let me have the boat, as I intended to cross that night. They consented but on condition that I should engage two men to bring the boat back after we had taken everything across. After obtaining their consent and finding two men who were willing for four dollars to go in the boat on the last trip to bring it back, I went to see my companions, who all but one agreed immediately. This one nevertheless decided [to go] but on condition that, since he could not swim, he should cross first to the other bank to receive the horses, but that he would not help to take them across.

It was half past eight when the boat was turned over to us. At nine o'clock we began to cross, swimming two horses each trip while at the same time taking over part of the baggage, using our shovels as paddles. At one o'clock in the morning the eleven horses, ourselves and all our baggage were on the other side.

Once arrived on the other bank we were sure of not being further retarded in our journey and in any other spot would have been able to rest and wait for daylight. But here there were mosquitoes by the million, we did not know where to take refuge, and even the horses were so tormented that they were kicking and we were running the risk of losing them [so] I proposed that we continue our journey. Here also there were sloughs to cross and it was on this side that two Americans had lost their lives, but the torment to which we were subjected was unendurable, so everyone agreed and in less than a quarter of an hour we were on our way.

## 10

We passed through several bad places without much difficulty. The greatest danger was of getting off the road, which was rarely well marked, and of becoming lost in the midst of these swamps. Fortunately some travelers who had preceded us had lighted a large fire on the other side of the lowlands and this served as a beacon and guided us through these dangers. Towards two o'clock we reached the lagoon where an American had perished a few days before. There was hesitation for several minutes, but one of the Californians who had an excellent horse and who had shown

much coolness and courage during the whole trip having offered to go first, I followed him and all the others followed me. The night was clear, we went carefully, following as nearly as possible the crossing marked by the broken reeds, [and] in less than ten minutes we were on the other side and out of all danger.

As we approached the fire which had guided us, we found some thirty travelers, several of whom had arisen at the noise we had made in crossing the lagoon. They all expressed their astonishment on seeing us arrive at this hour of the night and by such roads. The place where we then were being quite high and dry, the horses were tethered near the lagoon where there was some grass, and each of us, worn out by fatigue, made himself as comfortable as he could on the sand to wait for daylight and to continue on our way.

At five o'clock our horses were saddled and everything was ready for a new start. The preceding day's journey had been hard and tiring and our way of living, also, was too frugal and did not well fit us to long endure such hardships. I could not but notice the difference in this regard between the living of the Frenchmen and Californians who were with me and that of the Americans and other foreigners whom we met on our way. On leaving the Pueblo de San José each of us brought his *mochila*, a sort of leather caparison which covers the saddle and the horse's flanks, and a blanket, to make his bed and his covering. I was the only one who also had a cloak. Our provisions consisted of dried meats, of bread which had been cut up and prepared in the shape of biscuits, of *pinol* [ *pinole* ] or flour made of roasted corn, of cheese, tea and sugar. Strictly speaking, that sufficed to prepare a meal, for we had also brought a kettle and a pot, but having accustomed ourselves to profit by the coolness of the morning, we generally set out before sunrise and so early that it was impossible to prepare anything. The Americans and most of the other foreigners, however, traveling with wagons, had everything [that they needed] with them and had their three meals a day regularly. Those with whom we were this morning were preparing a copious meal, of fresh meat, ham, tea and coffee. My companions had a bit of bread and cheese. Nevertheless they did not complain, but I took pity on them and again I sacrificed part of the single bottle of brandy I had brought and gave each of them a drop before starting.

I had not been able to examine the country over which we had passed during the preceding night. That where we were now was but a tongue of land between two great pools or lagoons, and all the portion which we had crossed, toward the San Joaquin, seemed the same as that on the other side of the river, although less wooded--that is to say, [it consisted of] meadows and swamps which extended as far as the eye could see.

Our way now went through a dry and sandy country which like the land near the mountains west of the river afforded little pasturage. After having gone to the south and southeast for a mile to get around the last lagoon, the road turned again to the east-northeast and when we had made about two leagues in that direction, still over this sandy and ungrateful soil, we finally came into another zone and continued on our way through a well- wooded country, covered with pasturage and as beautiful as one could hope to see.

I judged that we were two leagues and a half or three leagues from the river, [and] that this was the edge of the barren lands. At least the trees here formed a line parallel with the river, which extended out of sight to the north and to the south.

After having gone about a league through this charming country, covered with fine oaks and like a park, we stopped at a place called *El campo de los franceses*, \* the French Camp, where there is a pretty stream of water and abundant pasturage. This place was given the name which it bears because in 1830 fifty or sixty Canadians--always considered French in this country--camped there for several days. We stopped there to let the worst heat of the day pass, to rest, and finally to cook some meat, of which we all felt the need.

##### 5. French Camp, between Lathrop and Stockton.

After a fair meal and a good rest in the shade of the handsome trees which border the stream, we started again at about half past two. It is about five leagues from there to the *arroyo de las calaveras*, \* and about seven or eight to the river *de los moquelemes*. \* The stream takes its strange name [River of the Skulls] from a war of extermination which the San José Mission had waged in 1818 against the Moquelome Indians, who had stopped near this stream to defend themselves. The

Spaniards, about sixty in number, mounted and well armed, left between two and three hundred Indians dead on the field and carried away many prisoners. Although these poor Indians had only bows and arrows, they defended themselves well. Four Spanish soldiers lost their lives there and several were wounded. The crime of which these poor people were accused was of trying to entice away the Mission Indians, that is to say, they were trying to persuade their seduced or abducted children, brothers and relatives to come home.

6. Calaveras River.

7. Mokelumne River.

Our way took us through a magnificent country, covered with beautiful oaks and grass and absolutely like a park; but lacking water, as is the case with all parts of Upper California in this season. Compared with many other countries, Upper California has but few rivers and steady streams. Almost all of them have their sources in low mountains or cross immense 12 plains and dry up in summer, or their waters sink into the soil and only appear from place to place.

Thus we covered six leagues, from French Camp to the *Arroyo de las Calaveras*, without encountering any water, and even this stream, which is an impassable torrent during the season of rains and of the first melting snows, today showed water only here and there [along its course].

The strangest thing is that in all this region the earth seems nevertheless to hold much moisture; for nothing could be more beautiful than the still half-green grass which covered all this part of the plain, especially near the stream. After watering our horses, we went to the farm of Doctor Isabell,  
\* for the Americans have already settled in this beautiful region, and possess the best lands. This doctor, like all his compatriots, had left for the Placer.

8. Farm of James C. Isbell near the present Lodi. See Bancroft, IV, 690; Lyman, Chester S., *Around the Horn to the Sandwich Islands and California, 1845-50* (New Haven, 1924), p. 263.

However, I obtained some watermelons and cantaloupes there and some Indians who have a *rancheria* or village nearby sold us a quarter of venison. With these provisions we went to make our camp on the bank of the *Arroyo de las Calaveras*, under a group of oaks, one of which I measured

and found to be twenty-one feet in circumference with a perfectly healthy trunk and an even spread of at least forty-five feet.

One remarkable thing that I have observed in all parts of Upper California in which I have traveled is that one never finds any of the large oaks broken down, fallen into decay or partly consumed by age and weather. All are sound and vigorous, all seem of the same stage of growth, and to see this great number of enormous trees, strong and full of life, one would say that they had all sprung up at the same time, and that they were the first of their kind to appear on this earth. These handsome trees, with the willows and the laurels, lent the greatest beauty to the place where we were camped.

*July 15th*

During the whole night we had seen a fire in the plain to the east of us, in the direction toward which we were going. There was a line of it three or four leagues long, rapidly approaching. Hardly had we started this morning when we were suffocated by a thick smoke which made it impossible to see anything at the least distance. For more than an hour we suffered from this discomfort, which at times was very great, until we reached the very place where all was aflame. While this fire was very lively, it was only consuming the grass and wild oats which, being very thick and dry, threw up a bright flame and were burning so fast that it would have been impossible to stop or to extinguish the fire. Moreover, several trees were afire and some, partly burned, had fallen across our way. This was but a slight obstacle to our progress, however, and the only one, for since the road was quite wide and free of grass and trees, the fire had stopped at its edges. We noticed even several places where this slight break had cut the line of the fire and had sufficed to save some considerable areas from destruction. 13 In less than half an hour we had passed the fire. That is to say, that as we approached the Moquelames [Mokelumne] River the fire was burned out, but everything was black and dismal. No more pasturage, no more grass, no more verdure--even the leaves of the trees had either been burned or withered by the fire. It was no longer the same country. This desolation extended for about a quarter of a league from the river--as far as the lowlands which are overflowed in the season of high water, for there the grass and all the plants were still green, and the fire could not touch them. The contrast was the greater in that the surroundings of this river are very pretty--

groups of superb trees, meadows covered with verdure and flowers--but these lands being low and damp, there is the great inconvenience of the mosquitoes, and it is said that from June to September fevers prevail there, and that generally near the river the country is unhealthful.

Again we found a great number of travelers and effects at the crossing of the river, but all the men being at breakfast, they kindly let us have the boat to put over our little baggage. This boat is nothing but a large hollow log, a sort of dugout [ *pirogue* ], but round on the bottom, with no outriggers [ *balançoire* ] and consequently very cranky. But the river, already low, was only 60 feet wide and its greatest depth at this place was but 10 to 12 feet. We forced the horses into the water and they all swam across.

As we wished to reach the Cosmanes [Cosumnes] River ( *rio de Gasion* ) today at a place where an American has established a mill, \* we still had from 10 to 12 leagues to go, so we simply crossed, re-saddled our horses and went on our way. Not far from the river we again came into country which had been completely burned over and was still smoking. At 11 o'clock we stopped at a place called Arroyo Seco, \* which the fire had not reached and where there was some water.

9. Probably William Daylor's mill on the north side of the Cosumnes River. Daylor, an English sailor, is said to have left his ship in California in 1835, to have entered Sutter's service in 1840-41, and settled on the Cosumnes with Sheldon, his brother-in-law, about 1844. His character was highly praised in a manuscript submitted to Bancroft by John Yates, who knew him in 1842-43. General Kearny camped on his rancho in 1847. He mined with Weber in 1848 and died of cholera in 1850. Bancroft, *History of California*, II, 778; V, 782.

10. Dry Creek.

About an hour after noon the heat became such that one felt uncomfortable even in the shade. Nevertheless the desire to reach the mill today decided us to get under way again by about two o'clock. We did not know the place through which we should pass. This day turned out to be the cruelest of all that we had had up to that time.

Before we saddled our horses the idea occurred to me of having a test made, in order to determine whether this stream, which is quite a long one in the rainy season, bore any gold. We had our *bateas*, a sort of large, shallow wooden dish of from 12 to 14 inches in diameter, which serve to wash gold-bearing soil. I had one filled with earth taken from the streambed, near the middle, in a

place where it was dry. The operation of washing the earth I delegated to Arnaud Maubé, who had engaged for some time in the washing of auriferous soil in Mexico. In less than half an hour, to our great astonishment, he showed us some gold which had remained in the bottom with a little black sand, which here as everywhere else seemed to me to be oxydized iron and grains of ruby. The gold was so fine that we had to use the magnifying glass to see that it was in flakes, of which there were eight or ten. This discovery made me regret not to have applied the same test at each of the streams which we had crossed since the San Joaquin, all of which probably bear gold.

We started on as usual toward half past two. Not far from the stream at which we had stopped we entered a barren plain which extended farther than the eye could see. We were all astonished by the extreme heat which we suddenly felt on crossing the last of the little hills which surround the stream heat which increased as we went on and soon became absolutely unbearable. There was a breeze, it is true; but this northwest wind, so feared and so cold on the coast, had crossed sixty leagues of plain and of burning lands, and instead of refreshing, it was scorching, suffocating, as though it were coming from an oven. After three hours of this torture we approached a more or less wooded country, which gradually improved as we went on toward the east. At six or half past six o'clock we came to the river, and although the heat had much diminished, we were suffering so from thirst that as soon as we sighted it we all dashed at once for the place where one can climb down the bank to the water.

The mill is a league from the place where we had reached the river, and as we wished to arrive before nightfall, we went on immediately after we had refreshed ourselves and watered our horses. Following along beside the Cosumnes, the contrast with the desert which we had crossed was very great, for the banks of this river are very pretty. Although the country on the side where we were is less wooded than the opposite side (on the north), it had an abundance of grass and several fenced and cultivated fields, and seemed a paradise in comparison with the place which we had just left.

To reach the mill, it was necessary to cross the river, but as it was fordable in several places at this season, we got over without difficulty. I knew the owner of the mill. He received me affably, and offered me the hospitality of his house and his table, but tired out as I was and somewhat

indisposed, I accepted only a cup of tea and then rejoined my companions who had encamped again on the very bank of the river.

15

LE FORT SUTTER From the original illustration in Ferry's "La Nouvelle Californie," published in Paris, 1850. Doubtless this view of Sutter's Fort was copied from the lithograph which appeared in Jos. W. Revere's "Tour of Duty," New York, 1849.

## PART TWO

*In which Moerenhout continues his correspondence with the French Minister of Foreign Affairs regarding the journey of investigation to the California placers he had undertaken, setting forth in diary form the results of his findings.*

### DOCUMENT III--CONTINUED

*July 16th, 1848*

BEFORE we started out this morning, I measured the oak under which we had slept. At five feet above the ground it was seven to eight feet through, since its circumference was twenty-three to twenty-four feet. Its trunk was no less than fifty feet high and perfectly sound. Several other oaks in the vicinity seemed quite as enormous.

We were now in the gold-bearing district, for some had been taken out a league from the mill,<sup>\*</sup> and in such quantity that one person, with ordinary labor, might make a dollar an hour. There was even some at the mill itself, but in less quantity. Nor is this river the most southerly spot where it is found, for I had extracted some myself from the sands of the Arroyo Seco, and according to what I learned at the mill, the Indians called Moquelemes and who live on the river of that name come here to sell gold taken from the sands of that river and the nearby streams.

11. William Daylor's mill on the Cosumnes River. See footnote 9, *supra*.

But we were still twelve or fourteen leagues from the place where we intended to go, called by the Americans Dry Diggings, \* *exploitations sèches*, on account of the lack of water. It was from there particularly that gold was being taken at this time. The road that leads there first follows the north bank of the river for about a league. At that point it turns again in an east-northeasterly direction, leaving the valley. For although the road was still excellent and apparently level, it wound among hills and gradually ascended. For 16 five or six leagues the country is bare and appears arid--vertical strata of slate rock, a thin reddish soil and sparse bushes and scrub oak--but on approaching the *Sierra Nevada*, the hills and the whole country become more wooded and more beautiful. The earth is covered with verdure, the large trees become more frequent and more varied and all changes in nature and appearance.

12. The miners had not yet developed the humor and imagination that produced the characteristic place names of the gold country. Dry Diggings was a descriptive title borne by a number of places, but most prominently at this time by the region about what soon became Hangtown and later the more genteel Placerville. It is undoubtedly to this place that Moerenhout refers. See Bancroft, *Hist. of Calif.*, VI, 74-75.

At every stopping place where there was water I had tests made, and everywhere that we took earth from the ravines we found gold. In one little valley two leagues from the present diggings we found so much of it that my companions were tempted to stay there.

At about eight leagues to the east-northeast of the mill the country is thickly wooded and it grows more beautiful as one goes on toward the east. There is a chain of little hills through which the road winds, always fine and easy to travel. The pine trees increase in number with the advance and ascent, and all the hills are covered with them. But there, too, all the country had been burned over, and except in a few spots the grass had been destroyed by fire.

Before reaching the place that was then being worked, we had to go over a rather high and steep hill, the only part of the route that was at all difficult. After descending it on the north-northeast side, we found ourselves in a pretty little valley where we saw tents, wagons, horses, oxen, and soon a multitude of men at work, some digging in the ravines between the many hills, others carting or washing the dirt. The hustle and bustle was like that of a great city.

As I wanted to go where some Frenchmen, Messrs. Cambuston, Roussillon, Sainsevain<sup>\*</sup> and others had located, we had to traverse the whole length of the valley, about a league. By the time we arrived it was night. This was what one might call the French Camp, where several of my compatriots besides those I have named were gathered. The place was well chosen, a little stream of excellent clear water, but with their usual negligence there was not a tent, nor an *enramada*,<sup>\*</sup> and though they gave me a hearty welcome and, considering where we were, a good supper, I had again, as during all my journey from San José, to sleep on the earth and to have the stars for bed canopy.

13. These Frenchmen were all of some prominence in California before the conquest. Henry Cambuston had been Director of Education and Public Printer, 1843-45, was imprisoned by Stockton on suspicion of spying for Castro, 1846, testified in the Limantour case, and in 1856 was committed to the Stockton Insane Asylum, where he died a few years later. See Calif. Hist. Soc. *Quarterly*, Vol. XI I, pp. 46, 129. Pierre or Don Pedro Sainsevain, a native of Bordeaux, came to California in 1839. He and Charles Roussillon had a sawmill in the Santa Cruz mountains and built a schooner in 1846. Sainsevain also had a flour mill near San José. In August of 1848 he pioneered in the Southern mines and gave his name to the briefly famous Don Pedro's Bar. He was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1849. See Calif. Hist. Soc. *Quarterly*, Vol. XII, p. 353; Bancroft, V, 705,708-9, VI, 76.

14. A temporary shelter made of branches or brush over a wooden frame. The American miners, adopting the term, contracted it to "ramada."

*July 17th*

At daybreak all was astir. Men were leaving on foot and on horseback, loaded with pickaxes, picks and shovels, some going to loosen and dig out the dirt, others to cart it. Hardly a soul remained in camp. My traveling companions, likewise impatient to begin work, came to ask if I would lend them the pack horses to carry the dirt which must be brought from three or four miles away. I promised them the horses for three or four days and they set out immediately after some dirt.

17

Too tired last night to talk or get information of the present state of the gold country, it was only this morning that I learned the extreme richness of the place where I was, and at the same time the present difficulty of extracting the gold by means of washing, on account of the lack of water. This district, between the American and the Cosumnes rivers, was discovered at the beginning or toward the middle of June. The discoverers, still having water nearby, easily made two to three hundred

dollars a day there. Often they gathered up only the large pieces and used no other tools than a crowbar and a knife. But the Indians having told those who were working on the American River, eight hundred to a thousand people came here in less than a week, and soon partially exhausted the richest ravines that seemed the true original deposits of the gold, since it was found there only in good sized pieces and grains. As the water began to go down at about the same time, from the first to the tenth of July, the usual day's product soon became instead of ten to twenty ounces, only five or six. And now that there is almost no water, and the dirt is carried three or four leagues and even farther, it is not more than from two to four ounces.

Looking over the place where I found myself this morning, I saw that it was a little valley ( *vallon* ) formed on the one side by a sheer and rather high mountain, and on the other by some pretty hills which, like the mountain, were covered with handsome pines, cypresses, &c. At the foot of the mountain ran a stream, small but of fine clear water. As dirt was continually being brought from a league or more around and washed in it, however, it was almost filled up and the water was muddied.

The method of washing the dirt most generally adopted here is by means of a *maquina*, dirt-washing machine, for besides the *bateas* or wooden dishes before mentioned, an extremely simple machine has been invented \* which, worked by four men not including those who pick, shovel and transport the dirt, is capable of washing two tons per day.

15. The honor of introducing the rocker or cradle has been claimed for Isaac Humphrey, who had mined in Georgia, and for the French Canadian, Jean Baptiste Ruelle, who had worked in the placers of Mexico. Bancroft, VI, 68,69; Hittell, John S., *Mining in the Pacific States of North America*, S. F. 1861, p. 15. Mason calls it "a rude machine known as the cradle," and gives a description similar to Moerenhout's. Mason to Adj. Gen., Aug. 17, 1848, *31st Cong., 1st Sess., House Ex. Doc. No. 17*, p. 529.

The *bateas* are, as I have said, simply *sebillas* or wooden dishes ( *plats* ) of 12, 14 and as much as 16 inches in diameter, hollowed out but shallow and perfectly smooth inside. These dishes are filled two-thirds full of dirt, which is first well washed and stirred, holding the dish under water in order to dissolve the earth and separate it from the gold and the stones. Then the washing is continued, constantly dipping or pouring in water and giving the dish a motion which, throwing the water

from the bottom or back of the dish toward the front, carries with it the earth, the stones and all the parts lighter than the gold. After this operation, which requires both patience and care, the gold remains in the bottom or back of the dish, which is always kept somewhat tilted. It is found there with a sort of black sand, which here, as by the rivers, seems like the residue of the gold-bearing soils, and probably is composed, as I have said, simply of oxidized iron and grains of ruby. This sand, which is very heavy, is difficult to separate from the gold. The 18 method here employed, is to dry it together with the gold over a fire and then to separate them by tossing them in a plate or dish and blowing on it. But by this crude method a considerable amount of gold is lost, for all the lightest flakes blow away with the sand. As for the *maquinas* (machines), these are wooden troughs or boxes that have exactly the form of a dugout canoe, but open at one end. This trough or dugout is 12 or 14 feet long and inside it pieces of wood or ribs are nailed or fastened, running across it at intervals of a foot or 15 inches, exactly like the ribs of a boat. They serve to stop the gold or to prevent its being carried off by the water with the earth and the stones.

On top, at the front of the machine, is affixed another box which is about two feet long, of the same width as the machine, and fits on it. At the bottom of this box is an iron grate or simply a sheet of copper, tin plate or iron [perforated] with holes from half to three-quarters of an inch in diameter. It is in this box that the dirt and water are thrown, and the stones being retained by the grate or sort of sieve at the bottom, only the earth and the gold fall into the main [part of the] machine. The dirt in the upper box is constantly stirred while water is poured in to dissolve it and to detach it from the rocks. The latter are thrown out as they are washed clean and begin to obstruct [the operation].

To make the water and the sand flow through the machine itself, it is inclined slightly. As it is supported at the ends by two pieces of wood three or four inches thick and curved in the form of a crescent, which permit of rocking it like a cradle, the water flowing through the machine is thus given another semicircular motion, that forcibly stirs up the earth and the stones that are mixed in it, particularly between the ribs, and forces them toward the open end. The rocking of the water back and forth makes this method of washing the dirt easier and much faster. The gold stops at the first, second and third ribs. It rarely goes farther. Nevertheless care must be taken to stir up the earth in the bottom of the machine from time to time, for despite the double motion given the water,

the clayey soil in which the gold is found is so sticky that it adheres to the bottom of the machine, covers up its ribs and would soon form a smooth surface over which both water and earth would flow.

As I have already said, it takes four men to work this machine, one to throw in the dirt, another to pour in water, a third to move or rock it and a fourth to stir the dirt on the grate, scrape it from the bottom of the machine, throw out rocks, etc. But for the complete operation of one of these machines, that is to say, to dig the dirt, to sort it more or less, to cart it, wash it, etc., at least eight to ten men are needed, depending upon the nature of the ground from which it is taken, the distance and the difficulties of transportation. But one of these machines, well supplied with dirt and constantly in motion, can wash a ton of dirt in three or four hours, and a ton of dirt is estimated always to yield from 16 to 25 and up to 30 ounces of gold. At present, however, there is nowhere in this district sufficient water to keep a machine going for more than four to six hours per day and the average daily earnings now, even of those who work with machines, are reckoned as only three or four ounces.

After having examined this place and the mechanism, so simple and so efficacious, that was being used to wash gold-bearing earth, I went on foot to see the ground from which the gold was being taken. It was not later than six or six-thirty o'clock in the morning when I set out, and already I met several men who were returning with dirt which they were carrying on their horses in *alforgas* or large leather pouches or sacks hanging on either side of the saddle while the driver is mounted behind.

To reach the place that was being worked, or from which the dirt was being taken at this time, it was necessary again to go through the pretty valley that we had traversed on our arrival. Examining it more carefully, I found that it was only about one mile in width by about four in length. Quite a sizeable stream flows through the middle, but at this time there was water in it only here and there and in small quantity. In some spots on either side of the stream are groups of superb oaks. There the merchants had set up their tents and their shops, and as the valley itself is formed by low hills covered by cypresses and pines of different kinds, either isolated or in groups, but never in the

profusion of a forest, the view that strikes the eye on entering this little valley is truly a pretty one. It was still the center of the richest diggings and the principal route of those who were going and coming from work, carrying dirt, etc., and there was such movement and confusion of people that one might have thought himself at a village festival or fair in Europe.

As I went in through the valley, I noticed that the little ravines between the hills had been dug up from top to bottom and had been abandoned. I also noticed that the mining was done only in these ravines, and only in the very center of them, for the ditch or space that had been dug out was nowhere more than three or four feet wide and in depth varying from two to three feet, depending upon where the bed-rock was reached. When I examined the rocks and the soil of these ravines I found that they were, in part, the same as those over which we had traveled for more than eight leagues to the west, that is to say, a reddish soil about a foot and a half or two feet deep on the surface, and underneath a clayey rock, split by more or less narrow cracks, decomposed near the surface and brittle to the depth of two or three feet, but below that hard and compact.

At about a league from our camp and two-thirds of the way through the valley, I finally came upon the first workers. The places where they were digging were three little ravines\* \* that separate the three hills and come together toward the bottom in the form of a stream. The workmen were swarming there like so many ants. Those who were digging the dirt used various implements, but mostly pickaxes and picks. I noticed that the first and most difficult labor was to dig out and throw aside some large individual rocks that were in the gulch. After that the next and most considerable work was to take out the stones, etc., for a distance of a foot to a foot and a half from the little canal worn out by the water, and to dig a ditch a foot or two wide. The red dirt or surface soil is also thrown aside, although there near the gulches it always contains a little gold. Immediately under this soil is found a grayish, ashen, clayey dirt. This is the true gold-bearing dirt. Still deeper, at a foot and a half or two feet, it is found in the form of slate, foliated but very brittle, and the gathered fragments of which will dissolve in water. This work is continued to the depth of about three feet, where the hard and compact stone affords no more cracks or fissures into which the gold might have entered or crept.

\*I use the word ravine ( *ravin* ) because these interstices or little canals between the hills were worn out by the waters in the heavy rains, but they are not, however, what the word ravine seems to indicate, places deeply hollowed out by the streams and torrents. The hills here being low and gently sloping, the passage of the water is barely evident in the hollows between them, and it is rarely that one sees a canal more than three feet wide by six inches to a foot in depth. (Moerenhout's note.)

\*

16. The word generally used in the mining region to express the idea that Moerenhout is evidently trying to convey is *gulch*. Moerenhout's *ravin* will accordingly be so translated hereinafter, wherever the context warrants. His *travailleurs* will similarly be rendered *miners*, when this seems appropriate, his *terre* as *dirt*, the miners' term, his *exploiter* as to mine or to work, his *exploitations* as *diggings*.

Here as in the places that I had visited before, and where the work had been abandoned, the mining was limited to digging in the beds of the ravines and for a foot or two on either side, although the gold is found distributed to a much greater width, toward the hills. Of this I saw proof right here, where several of the miners, equipped only with their knives and little iron bars, do not wash the dirt at all, but simply gather the visible grains and pieces that they find, especially on the sides of the gulches or below the hillsides ( *sous les routes des collines* ). All those (and there were quite a number of them) who occupied themselves with this manner of working these deposits, assured me that this method, which requires a little practice and much patience, is nevertheless nearly always the most profitable; that it was there that the largest pieces of gold were found, which the water had not been able to carry down into the gulch; that it was found in stratified deposits ( *veines* ) that they followed under the hillsides until slides prevented them from continuing the work.

Being present when an American, who had no other tool than his knife, found a rather large piece, I proposed that he sell it to me, to which he immediately agreed. I had neither scales nor money, but he told me to take it with me, to weigh it and send him whatever it came to.

The work of digging, removing, loading and transporting the dirt is truly painful, especially between nine or ten o'clock in the morning and three 21 o'clock in the afternoon, for the heat is intense. That notwithstanding, wherever I went, from hill to hill, I found a multitude of people at work. In some places, famous for their richness, like the first I had visited, the miners were in such crowds that they could hardly move about. The abundance of gold there was something marvelous, and in fact, although the gold is scattered so profusely everywhere for several leagues around, there

are nevertheless some places much richer than others, and when one of these *bonansas*, as they are called here, is found, everyone rushes in, for there one day, one hour, sometimes suffices to make a small fortune.

I am told the most extraordinary things in this regard. A man with whom I was talking this morning, the same one [James W. Marshall] who undertook the construction of a mill on the American River for M. Sutter and who first discovered that this river bore gold, and was the cause of all the discoveries that have been made since then, assured me that in the month of June, at the place where we then were, he had gathered up more than six pounds of gold in less than an hour. But such cases are extremely rare and these places are promptly exhausted.\* \* Of one thing, however, I could be sure, and that was that in the whole district that is called Dry Diggings, the average daily yield per man was still at least three or four ounces.

\*The one who sold me the piece of gold, called *El Posero* [ *Pocero*, The Well-Digger], returned to Monterey in August with 25 pounds of gold, after an absence of six weeks. He was alone with an Indian, and they regularly gathered ten ounces a day, or five ounces apiece. (Moerenhout's note.)

Toward eleven o'clock and noon the heat became excessive and I began to regret having come on foot. Fortunately, at the end of one of these gulches, I found the men with whom I had come, and as my Indian servant was with them I sent him for my horse. The first day of this sort of work seemed very hard to my traveling companions. They were all bathed in sweat. M. Labourdère said that it was a nigger's work. The others on the contrary seemed quite pleased, showed me several pieces of gold that they had gathered, and swore that they would not leave these parts before they had two or three thousand dollars each.

While resting there in the shade of a fine tree (for these are everywhere to be found as soon as one goes up the hill a bit) I had occasion to see the dry washing of gold ( *de voir extraire l'or à sec* ). Those who were doing this work were inhabitants of Sonora, a province of Mexico. Having adopted their country's method of extracting the gold, or separating it from the dirt and stones, they had the advantage of being able to work at the same place where the metal is found. The operation is simple but requires practice.

After having assembled or amassed the dirt and all the fragile parts of the clayey rock, which they carefully break and pulverize, they put it in the sun to dry. When it is quite dry and somewhat reduced to dust, they toss it in a sort of winnowing basket ( *van* ) to separate the little stones from it and to let the dust blow out. But not being able to clean it thoroughly by this method, they let the gold and the dirt fall from this basket which they shake above their heads, onto a cloth spread out on the ground. The dust, especially if there is a breeze, blows away, and according to them the gold, even to the tiniest particles, falls perpendicularly to their feet on the cloth. The principal thing that this method of extracting gold requires is to dry the dirt well, and the only difficulty about it is to separate the little stones from the gold. These men complained, however, that the dust was bad for them and feared that they might not be able to continue the work. As it is, their method would otherwise be easy and profitable, for they assured me that they had made six or seven ounces apiece per day since they had been there.

In talking with them about the placers of Sonora, they assured me that they were not comparable to these and although there were also *bonanzas* there, from which great quantities of gold were taken, which often enriched the miners, the average day's earnings in the best places were but two to three dollars.

My servant having arrived with my horse, I returned to our little camp where I was awaited for dinner, a meal to which I did the better justice as it was three o'clock and I had not breakfasted.

So far as meat goes, food was quite plentiful at the placer; a M. Lee [Jacob P. Leese?] of Sonoma had brought in five hundred steers that he sold to the whites for twenty-five dollars apiece and to the Indians for one or two hundred. Several were killed each day. But despite this rather moderate price of meat, a dinner is enormously costly at the placer. Some pay a cook as much as thirty dollars a day, and the wine that we drank, though quite ordinary, sold for eight dollars a bottle. Following are the prices of the most necessary foods, the only ones, indeed, that can be had here: \*

17. These prices are quoted (with one discrepancy) at p. 15 of *Les Français en Californie* by Daniel Lévy, who drew his information from Moerenhout.

Fresh or dried meat \$ .12 1/2 the pound

Flour per Spanish bu., 25 lbs. 25.

Sugar per lb. 2.

Rice d[o;]. 1.

Tea d[o;]. 5.

Biscuit per cwt. 50.

Wine and brandy per bottle 8.

All was paid for in placer gold at \$16 per ounce. Concerning the enormous prices at which everything sold here, I remarked to my companions on the difference between the Americans' way of traveling and that of the Californians and of many Frenchmen. The Americans come in carts, bringing all provisions and everything necessary for the trip or for the time that they intend to be away, have no expenses except for fresh meat, which, strictly

#### ON THE ROAD TO THE MINES--A CAMPFIRE

LIFE AT THE "DIGGINS"--SUPPER TIME (From the Dutch edition of Ryan's *Adventures in California*, reproduced through the courtesy of Mr. Carl Hoffman.)

23 speaking, they can do without. Some, bringing their wives and children with them, take their meals at regular hours and live almost as they would at home. The Californians and the Frenchmen, on the other hand, come on horseback, bring provisions for only a few days and eat poorly, irregularly and at random, and are obliged either to leave after a short time or to buy provisions at exorbitant prices.\* \*

\*These differences in the manner of provisioning and going to the Placer have another consequence that I had occasion to notice at the Pueblo of San José and at Monterey since my return. It is that the American, better equipped and more persevering, does not return until he has amassed quite a considerable sum, rarely less

than three to four thousand dollars, whereas the Californian, obliged to return for lack of provisions or less avid or more careless of the future, comes back after a week or two with seldom more than eight to twelve hundred dollars. (Moerenhout's note.)

Wishing to know what the day's work of my neighbors in the valley had been, I found it to be divided as follows:

3 Frenchmen who came with me 7 Oz. 9/16

29 Messrs. Sunol. Sainsevain, Roussillon & Amador & 25 Indians 130 oz.

3 Arnaud Maubé & 2 Californians 19" 5/16

3 A German & 2 Indians 7" 8/16

2 An Englishman & a Californian 6"

40 persons produced 160 oz. 6/16

*July 24th*

In the six days past, I have visited all the environs for three or four leagues around. Everywhere gold is plentiful and wherever it is dug the average day's product is at least three or four ounces. The places where gold is found, and of which only a small part is being worked now, are two valleys or the lands situated between three lesser chains that descend from the first ranges of the *Sierra Nevada* Mountains and run, as nearly as I can judge by the compass, nearly east and west. Neither of these valleys is more than three to four leagues in width and their length, judged by the eye, must be from eight to ten leagues at least. Now while I call the intervals between these mountain chains, valleys, I do not mean by that plains or a continuous stretch of level land, for on the contrary these intervals are filled with innumerable hills which, detached from these same mountain chains, run in all directions and form little valleys everywhere, like the one that I have described above. It is these hills and their thousands of gulches that are the true gold-bearing lands, where this metal is found in the greatest abundance, but in grains and pieces. It would seem that

these are the veritable deposits 24 from which the finer gold is carried by the waters and scattered far in the streams and rivers.

As I traveled about this country I became convinced that not the thousandth nor perhaps the millionth part of the [gold-bearing] lands is either known or touched, and that despite the fact that some of these gulches have been abandoned, none of the mines is exhausted. Taking dirt at random in the gulches that had been most worked and for a long time abandoned, not only did I find gold there, but I found it in a proportion almost equal to those of the most talked of present diggings. I therefore think that this country is hardly known at all and has hardly been scratched, that there are riches there for many years to come, and that next year after the rains the places or gulches now supposed to be exhausted will be, if not the richest, at least the most productive; for the waters washing these lands already worked over will leave the gold bare on the bed-rock or will throw it together in the hollows and holes of the ditches that [the miners] have dug.

Another thing of which I am sure is that the principal deposit of gold is not limited to the small gulches between the many hills; for besides the remarks in this regard made by the Americans and mentioned above, I made some experiments myself, which proved to me that the hills also all contain gold toward their bases, near the gulches. In several tests made with earth taken at a depth of two feet and at ten and fifteen feet from the gulches, I found more or less of gold everywhere. In six trials made with earth taken at the same depth but at one hundred and one hundred and fifty feet from the gulches and half way up the hills, I found gold in two places. It appears certain, therefore, that it is the hills themselves that are, if not the principal, at least the original depository and the source from whence all the gold has come; from whence, carried by the waters, it is deposited in the gulches between the hills, in the streams of the valleys, and in the rivers of the distant plains.\* \*

\*I do not believe, however, that the gold that is found in the American River comes from the hills of the Dry Diggings. It must come from the hills and lands nearer to the [American River] diggings, for it is probable that there also the gulches of the hills and the nearby hills themselves contain it, but up to the present time, no search has been made. Everyone goes to the richest places that are already known and all the rest is neglected. (Moerenhout's note.)

In an excursion that I made accompanied by three Californians who were going to a village or *ranchería* of Indians whom they wished to hire, I had an Opportunity of seeing this beautiful country for many leagues to the east towards the *Sierra Nevada*. The farther one goes in this direction the more wooded it becomes, and the more beautiful trees there are, especially pines, cypresses and other coniferous trees. It was then that I observed that the valleys where the principal diggings had been located were formed by mountain chains that extended for a great distance and seemed to break off 25 from the first ranges of the high *Sierra Nevada* Mountains. In many places we made hasty assays of the dirt in the gulches, and everywhere we found gold. It was then, looking upon these thousands of hills and the gulches between them, upon these many streams in the little valleys, streams that bear gold in flakes and in larger quantities, places still virgin and untouched; it was then I say, that I became convinced that these riches, scarcely touched, will neither be exhausted in a few years nor even in centuries.

*July 25th*

Having finished my observations in this district and having taken [samples of] the gold-bearing dirt, of the rocks and of the crystallizations, and having succeeded in purchasing the largest piece of gold found up to that time in this district,\* \* I took advantage of the company of some people who were starting for the mill at the American Fork, to go and examine that gold-bearing region. I took with me only my Indian servant, for those who had accompanied me from the Pueblo wished to stay where they were. They were able to repay all that I had advanced for them, and I sold them one of the pack-horses for what it had cost me, the other one having been stolen. All of them were doing well, and all except the Californians spoke of staying until winter set in.

\*This piece weighed only about four and a half ounces. I bought it for four and seven-sixteenths ounces. I have since been told of a piece weighing seven ounces, one of two pounds six ounces, and one of four pounds weight, but despite my efforts, I was unable to find the persons who had them. (Moerenhout's note.)

It was a distance of about five leagues from there to the place on the American Fork where a mill had been built [Sutter's mill at Coloma] For two or three leagues the country is about the same as

at the Dry Diggings, well wooded and with easy roads between the hills. Near the river it becomes more barren and more sterile in appearance.

Toward noon we arrived at the first diggings, but there were not here the multitude and the confusion of the places that I had just left. Here the miners were working at considerable distances from each other and there were not more than 250 to 300 people on the whole extent of the river.

The gold found here is taken principally from the banks on the sides of the river, where it is held in the clayey soil and caught in the crevices and fissures of the rocks. It is found also and perhaps in greater abundance in the soil carried down by the river and deposited on the turns, in the bends, on the little islands and other places that have been left dry. From one of these islands, only about an acre in size, called The Mormons' Diggings, \* *les exploitations des Mormons*, and situated some distance below the mill, more than a hundred thousand dollars in gold has been taken out in a month, and this deposit is not yet exhausted. Here also the gold is found at a depth of only two or three feet. Below is granite, which is the base of this region and forms the bed of the river. The gold here is in flakes that diminish in 26 quantity and size in proportion as one descends the river. It is extracted by means of the machines described above, and as the earth is taken from right beside or near the water, the work of washing is less difficult, but it is also less productive than at "Dry Diggings," for the daily yield here is scarcely more than one or one and a half ounces per man.

18. It was on Mormon Island that the first rich strike was made. The place was visited by Governor Mason on July 5, and he describes the methods of mining employed there. Mason to Adj. Gen., Aug. 17, 1848, *op. cit. supra*.

Here no more than there is the gold confined to the earth carried by the rivers, for it has been found in grains and pieces in many gulches between the hills, but above the places where the washing is done and in spots that are difficult of access and too far from the river to permit of carrying the dirt there.

The place where the mill was built has become celebrated as the origin and cause of the famous discovery of the placers in the northern part of this country. Towards the middle of 1847, M. Sutter, a Swiss by nationality and the proprietor of New Helvetia, whose spirit of enterprise has so often been useful and has caused so many changes and improvements in this section of Upper California,

had started the erection of a sawmill on the south branch of the American Fork, where beside the facility that the river offers, there are magnificent forests a short distance to the east and to the south. Having dug a ditch by which the water was to be brought to the mill, they made a trial of it in the month of February, last, but finding that it was not deep enough, they stopped the water in order to deepen it, and it was in recommencing this operation that the workmen discovered that the water had deposited there a certain metal, which M. Sutter had tested and which they found to be gold of an excellent quality. \*

19. Materials bearing on the discovery are collected in Bekeart, Philip B., "James Wilson Marshall," *Quarterly of the Soc. of Calif. Pioneers*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 31-42.

Without suspecting the great result that this first discovery was going to have and believing that the earth carried by the river to this place was the only gold-bearing soil in this region, M. Sutter solicited of the Governor at Monterey the right to exploit it for his own account. But before he received the negative answer, the news of this discovery had spread, \* and many Americans, without so much as giving notice to M. Sutter, began mining there, and other discoveries were made. The Mormons discovered the small island previously mentioned and began their mining towards the end of April. The rivers Bear ( *des ours* ), Uvas 4 ( *Yuba of the Americans* ) and Plumas ( *des plumes* ) [Feather] were explored and gold was found everywhere. In May or June an Irishman, crossing from the American Fork to the Cosumnes discovered the famous region now known as *Dry Diggings*, where gold exists in such profusion and abundance that all those who went there in the beginning while there was still enough water in the streams for washing the dirt [returned with small fortunes] \* obtained in a few weeks and often in a few days.\* \*

20. Sometime in February Sutter sent Charles Bennett to Governor Mason at Monterey with a sample of gold, in an endeavor to secure title to the mill property at Coloma. Bancroft, VI, 43-44; Sherman, William T., *Memoirs*, N. Y. 1875, 1, 40. Bennett let the news out at Benicia (Bancroft, VI, 43) and at Yerba Buena. Brown, John Henry, *Early Days of San Francisco*, S. F., 1933, pp. 70-72.

21. There seems to be an omission, perhaps by the copyist, at this point. The matter in brackets is assumed from the context.

\* M. Vallejo at Sonoma assured me of having weighed four thousand dollars in gold which an inhabitant of that place had obtained in three days of work. (Moerenhout's note.)

27

July 26th

Very early this morning I started for Bear River ( *el Arroyo de los Osos, le ruisseau ou rivière des ours* ) accompanied only by my Indian servant. The road was quite well defined and like all those of this region went through valleys between the hills. As we approached the river the country again became very wooded. It is supposed that there is gold in these hills too, but having no *batea* and not daring to stop in an unfamiliar country where it would be necessary to go in search of water, I was unable to make any experiments or assays. When we reached the stream I found that it is very low at this season, and at the place where I crossed, near the farm of a M. Jonsson [William Johnson], it was nearly dry. Seeing no workmen there \* I was prompted to go on.

22. Moerenhout evidently missed the famous J. Tyrwhitt Brooks and party, who according to this California Munchausen camped on Bear River and took out 115 pounds of gold by September. Brooks, J. Tyrwhitt, *Four months Among the Gold Finders*, London, 1849, pp. 119-61. See Note 1 to Introduction, *supra*, p. 76. Bancroft (VI, 72) accepts the statement, but notes that Lieutenant Buffum had no such success there!

The country between the Bear and the Yuba ( *Uvas* ) rivers is more beautiful than that between the latter and the American River. Despite the great ravages of fire there, many valleys were of charming aspect, but had the road not been so well defined I should certainly have been lost in the midst of the wooded hills that were absolutely alike. It was four o'clock in the afternoon when I arrived at the [Yuba] river. The road had led me to a place where there was a multitude of men at work, all Americans or foreigners and Indians. \*

23. According to Bancroft the pioneers on the Yuba were Patrick McChristian, Jacob P. Leese, Jasper O'Farrell, William Leery and Samuel Norris, who left Sonoma in July and took \$75,000 from their Yuba Diggings in three months. Bancroft, VI, 72. But Dr. Lyman says that John Marsh and party left in May and went directly to the Yuba. Marsh came out with \$40,000. Lyman, George D., *John Marsh, Pioneer*, N. Y., 1931. Moerenhout was presumably in the vicinity of "Marsh's Diggings," later known as Parks Bar.

After a half-hour's rest in the tent of those who had offered me hospitality, I remounted my horse to look over the banks of the river, which are quite pretty, and to visit some of the places that were being mined. I saw that the work here was just the same as on the American River, that the gold was of the same quality, occurred in the same way and gave the same or nearly the same production, for the average day's earnings were likewise from an ounce to an ounce and a half.

July 27th

Early this morning I started for the Feather River ( *rivière des plumes* ). The distance is but eight leagues, and I arrived at the place where the principal washings ( *lavages* ) have been established, \* before ten o'clock. There were not many people and almost all the workmen were Indians, for these mining operations are principally directed by Americans who, having farms in the vicinity, can easily obtain Indians. The manner of extracting the gold and these washings or diggings were absolutely the same as on the other rivers. The gold is found in the earth brought down by the water but principally near the eddies. On the turns and in the bends much was found, also on the sides of the banks in the places where the slope is gradual and the waters deposit soil. It is also taken from the fissures of the rocks, and a few days before my arrival an American had taken more than a pound of gold from a crack in a rock on the bank of the stream at an elevation of several feet above the water, which seems to prove that a large part of the gold that is found in these rivers, and probably all of it, does not come from high up the streams, but from the hills and lands along the sides.\* \* Another thing occurred here to confirm my opinion on this point. Two pieces of gold were brought to me, one of a little more than half an ounce and the other of an ounce in weight. Both had been found at some distance from the river, on some bluffs and more than sixty feet above the water. \* Another individual had taken nearly three ounces of gold in grains and pieces, just like the gold of the Dry Diggings, out of a gulch three leagues from the river. The earth here, as all along the edge of the *Sierra Nevada* is a reddish clayey soil on top and grayish or ashen below, and altogether quite shallow in the hills.

24. Probably Bidwell's Bar.

\*All here assured me that one or two leagues above to the east, toward the source of the river, no gold is found. It seems also that fifteen miles farther down it becomes more scarce and finer, and the whole length of the diggings is not twenty miles. (Moerenhout's note.)

These pieces had a distinguishing characteristic, however. They were brilliant and like pebbles, almost round and as though they had been rolled. I wanted to buy them, but their possessor refused to sell them. He was one of a company of eight in number who had made sixty-three thousand dollars in forty-two days. They employed from fifty to sixty Indians. (Moerenhout's note.)

July 28th

Beginning to feel the effect of these journeys in a season when the heat is excessive, and convinced that these diggings and the gold that they produce were everywhere the same, I determined to go no farther. As I was in some fear of getting lost or of meeting with serious difficulties should I attempt to follow down along the Feather River to the Sacramento, I decided to go back by the Mill road and to follow the American River to New Helvetia. So I set out at daybreak this morning on the Mill road.

Impatient now to end my trip and to return to Monterey, I tried to make haste and stopped no more to observe the country or to examine the soil, but our horses, already very tired, were suffering so from the heat that despite my impatience I judged it prudent to stop and let the worst heat of the day pass. At the place where we rested there were water and grass, it was shady and quite delightful, but it was a wilderness. Probably there was not a human being for several leagues around, unless it were Indians, who, more redoubtable than the bears, inspired a terrible fear in the one who accompanied me.

At three o'clock we started again. By six I was at the Mill.

*July 29th*

Although my horses seemed very tired, I continued my journey this morning and was off long before sunrise. It is about ten or twelve leagues from the Mill to M. Sutter's fort, and I went two or three leagues farther in order to visit the Lower Diggings, *les exploitations d'embas*, situated six leagues from the Sacramento and five leagues from New Helvetia. There were still some men working there. The gold seemed to me to be the same as higher up the river, perhaps a little finer, but as it is less abundant the best day's earnings here are not more than one ounce.

Before we arrived at the farm of Lydesdorph [William Alexander Leidesdorff], situated two or three leagues from New Helvetia, my servant's horse would carry him no farther. He had to lead him by hand, and to go afoot himself. It was late when we arrived at the farm where I found myself compelled to stop for the night.

I was now outside the limits of the gold region, for it seems no gold is found lower than three or four leagues from the Sacramento or from the mouth of the American River, and it is the same with all the other goldbearing tributaries of the Sacramento and the San Joaquin. Although I had not been able to spend enough time to visit and examine carefully all the gold regions, I had nevertheless seen the various principal diggings from the Cosumnes to the Feather River, a distance of at least 75 to 80 miles from south to north. But while these are the present limits of the places from which gold is being taken, they are not the limits of the regions in which it is already known that gold exists.

At the Feather River I was assured that gold is found for more than 50 miles to the north in the beds of the creeks and of all the tributaries of the Sacramento. The mountains known as *Los Picos*, the [Marysville] Buttes, situated in the valley of the Sacramento at about 39° 32' north latitude, are a very rich deposit, but there is so little water that it is impossible to conduct mining there in this season. And when one reflects that the hills that cover the spaces between these rivers are everywhere the true depositories of the gold, the smallest particles of which have been carried by the waters toward the creeks\* and rivers and supply all the gold that is found in these streams, and when one reflects that these discoveries are extending toward the south just as they have spread to the north, that the Indians are already bringing gold taken from the vicinity of the *San Stanislaus* [Stanislaus River], and that there is every indication that they will not stop in this direction short of the old San Fernando placer\* in 34° north latitude, one is struck with astonishment, and wonders what influence such a discovery will have in this 30 new country and even in these seas, especially on considering that, according to the most moderate estimate, it is certain that already, in less than three months, more than four million dollars worth of gold has been taken from these deposits by miners averaging 1700 in number but continually changing and being replaced by others.

\*All the creeks that run through the little valleys between the Cosumnes and American rivers are filled with gold, but it is fine and in flakes as in the rivers. Not being so rich as the gulches between the hills. however, they have been neglected. It is a remarkable fact that these streams, so close to the gulches where gold is found in grains and [larger] pieces, only contain gold in flakes. This proves that the gold that is found in the gulches is too heavy to be carried very far, and that it comes from the very hills at the foot of which it is found and which are the only and true depositories of all the gold of these placers. (Moerenhout's note.)

25. See Introduction and footnote 8 thereto *supra*, pp. V, 80.

## TABLE

OF THE APPROXIMATE YIELDS OF THE VARIOUS DIGGINGS OF THE GOLD REGIONS,  
FROM THE 1ST OF MAY TO THE 31ST OF JULY, 1848, IN UPPER CALIFORNIA.

Feather River, 130 miners, from June 1st to July 31st \$ 180,000

Yuba "160" "15th" "31st" 200,000

Bear "60" "15th" "31st" 60,000

American "350" "May 1st" "31st" 600,000

Dry Diggings 1000 "June 1st" "31st" 3,000,000

1700 miners \$4,040,000

\*At the Dry Diggings there were also constantly from two to three hundred Indians working on their own account or employed by the whites. Many people think, too, that the yield of these diggings is much in excess of the figure that I have given. (Moerenhout's note.)

31

## MONTEREY AS MOERENHOUT SAW IT

(From a sketch in the Clinton Collection, presumably drawn by Moerenhout about 1847)

## PART THREE

*In which Moerenhout concludes his day by day account of his journey to the mines, together with letters likewise addressed to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs concerning the Gold Rush, written after his return to Monterey.*

## DOCUMENT III (CONTINUED)

*July 30th, 1848*

FROM LYDESDORPH's farm to the fort of New Helvetia is between two and three leagues. On approaching from the east, this fort makes a very pretty sight, situated as it is on a slight eminence between the Sacramento River and the American. It is an enclosure (*carré*) about a thousand feet long by 150 wide, with a wall of *adobes* or sundried bricks of earth and straw, three feet thick, with battlements and cannon at the corners, but without a moat.

The construction of this fort was an extraordinary enterprise that showed more a spirit of chivalry than a desire for economy and business, for the expenditures must have been enormous and it is difficult to understand with what purpose.\* The smallest blockhouse would have been sufficient for defense against the Indians, and any other project was visionary and blameworthy. For the California government of that time, 1842, having made an exception in favor of M. Sutter to the law which forbade foreigners to have possessions in the country, made him a gift of eleven leagues of land, and accorded other prerogatives to him that excited the jealousy of many or all of the foreigners and even that of the Californians, and that called for more than fidelity on M. Sutter's part.

26. Sutter's party landed at this place, Aug. 12, 1839. The fort was built, Sutter recorded, in 1841, "in Aug. & Sept. for protection of the Indians and of the Californians which became very [sic] jealous seeing these fortifications and 12 Canons and a field piece mounted, and two other brass pieces unmounted at the time." *The Diary of Johann August Sutter*, San Francisco, Grabhorn Press, 1932, pp. 13-14. It was described by many early travelers. Duflot de Mofras, Eugene, *Exploration du Territoire de l'Orégon, des Californies et de la Mer Vermeille*, Paris, 1844, 1, 1844; Frémont, J. C., *Memoirs of My Life*, Chicago, 1887, p. 352; Bryant, Edwin, *What I Saw in California*, London: Richard Bentley, 1849, pp. 242-45; Revere, Joseph W., *Tour of Duty in California*, New York, 1849, pp. 71,74. Nor should we omit the visit of our imaginative friend, J. Tyrwhitt Brooks, who was received with particular cordiality. Brooks, J. T., *Four Months Among the Gold-finders*, London, 1849, pp. 28-32.

M. Sutter had the merit of being the first to establish himself in a wild country, of subduing the Indians without warfare, without massacre, without even mistreating them, and of acquiring over them a great moral influence<sup>32</sup> due to his kindness and his sweetness of character as well as to great sacrifices; but unfortunately without result either for the Indians or for himself, or for the country.

His establishment and his other enterprises attracted a great number of foreigners, and especially Americans, who, always finding hospitality, encouragement, aid or employment at the fort, lived

there generally at the expense of M. Sutter until they were able to look over the country and settle there. It is a fact that nearly all the foreigners established in the Sacramento plain, many of whom have beautiful farms, cattle and other property, owe it to the protection, the assistance, the support, and the gifts of M. Sutter. But so much generosity and prodigality, and perhaps also some unprofitable and extravagant enterprises, had so completely ruined him that toward the end of 1847 and at the beginning of 1848 he was several times reduced to selling his property, and had it not been for the recent discovery of the gold region he would have had no recourse but to leave his establishment and California, or to withdraw and go to live in a more modest estate in some other part of the country. But thanks to the discovery that resulted from his spirit of enterprise, all has changed for him. The fort of New Helvetia, situated in the very center of the principal diggings, in a region accessible in all seasons by water and by land, has become the center of commerce and traffic; the place where all the principal houses of Yerba Buena wish to have stores; from whence goods are sent out to all points in the placers, from the Cosumnes to the Feather River; where gold is brought to be exchanged for merchandise, provisions and all that is needed by those working in the gold region.

I made a late start from Lydesdorph's farm because one of my horses was unable to travel further and I was obliged to leave him with a Frenchman who was going to the "Lower Diggings," and to take the horse that he had hired from the fort at the rate of five dollars a day. It was noon when I reached the fort, and although forewarned, I was astonished at the [stir and] confusion that reigned there--men on foot and on horseback; wagons going in and out, some bringing goods from the Sacramento landing, others taking them to the different mining regions. Within, the square was filled with casks, boxes, bales and workmen, and there was such a crowd and such a stir that one would have thought himself either in a Turkish bazaar or in one of the most frequented market places of Europe. M. Sutter was not in his quarters and I had a great deal of trouble finding him in the midst of all the crowd and the tumult, but when he was informed of my arrival he soon came and received me with his usual affability.

As he had kept only one small room for his own use, however, he could no longer afford the hospitality that formerly one was sure to find there. He came with me to the hotel into which the old

armory had been converted. All was in frightful confusion there. It was full and I had to wait 33 for an American and his wife who were leaving that day to move out before I could get a room. This room had no other furniture than two old chairs, and cost two dollars a day.\*

\*The room cost two and the food three--five a day. But their expenses were enormous. The house, which had only four rooms, a dining room, a kitchen, and a pantry, rented for five hundred a month. The cook drew one hundred and fifty dollars a month, and he did not care to stay at those wages. And besides the high price of provisions, the least servant, the worst scullion, had to be paid from three to four dollars a day. (Moerenhout's note.)

The fort, as I have previously said, is about one thousand feet long. All around the courtyard inside, it is divided into chambers and rooms, eighteen to thirty feet in length by fifteen to eighteen feet in width. They served formerly as lodgings for the Indian soldiers, of which M. Sutter had as many as two hundred. In the middle of the courtyard and extending about two-thirds of its length is the old armory. Now all is occupied and rented for gold; the armory as I have already said, for five hundred dollars a month; the other rooms and apartments at one hundred and fifty and two hundred dollars, and the total of the rent, according to what M. Sutter told me, came to eighteen hundred dollars a month, not including some houses outside, one of which was used as a hospital. The whole establishment soon would bring him, he hoped, from two to three thousand dollars a month.

I had no desire to remain long in the midst of this confusion and with men so tumultuously occupied. Another reason that hastened my departure was that we were then in the most unhealthful season and that I was in danger of catching the fevers that are dangerous and tenacious there and of which the fort and the whole vicinity of the Sacramento seemed already to be the principal focus. I had seen many sick at the American River, at the Yuba, and especially at the Feather. Here the hospital was filled. But notwithstanding my desire to leave promptly and to continue my journey, I had been trying in vain for four days to find a horse. As much as one hundred and fifty dollars was asked for miserable beasts that would not have carried me twenty leagues. At last M. Sutter advised me to rent one despite the price of five dollars a day and go to Vaca's farm,\* where I could be sure of finding one at a better rate, and said that his Indian who was to serve me as guide could return the rented horse.

27. Don Manuel Vaca, grantee of the Putah rancho, gave his name to the Vaca Valley and to the town of Vacaville.

*August 4th*

This morning about seven o'clock I left the fort to continue my journey but with the intention of passing through the Suisun (*Sushun*), Napa (*Napé*) and Sonoma valleys, which I wished to see. M. Sutter gave me all the attention that his business and the tumult in the midst of which he lived would permit. Before my departure from the fort he told the master of the ferry that he had established in the Sacramento River, to take me 34 over immediately, so that when I arrived at the river I found the boat waiting for me. This charming river, narrower at that point than the San Joaquin at the place where I had crossed it, seemed also to have but little current, for in rowing across we were able to make several *varas* upstream. Several sloops and small schooners were there, one of them discharging cargo. The mouth of the American River, that is within sight and scarcely a mile from the wharf, seemed to me, at least in this season, to have no influence upon the current of the Sacramento.

This pretty river has its source in the *Sierra Nevada* at about the forty-second degree north latitude. It runs first in a west-southwesterly direction, and only takes its course to the south or parallel to the *Sierra* at about the forty-first degree. Quite unobstructed along nearly its entire length, it is navigable by boats drawing from five to seven feet up to one hundred and sixty miles from its mouth and from there to the fortieth degree north latitude by large row-boats. As its current is never very strong, even in the seasons of the greatest floods, it is ascended easily and quickly, with the aid of the normal wind; but the descent is long and tiring because of these same winds and the slowness of the current. Its mouth is in Suisun Bay, into which it flows after joining or after receiving the waters of the San Joaquin.

On both sides opposite New Helvetia its banks are high and for a space a league in width and several leagues long they afford an easy road in almost all seasons. This section, although in appearance dry and sandy, is well wooded and pretty, but a league and a half or two leagues below, on the west side of the river, are what are called the *tules* or reeds. It is a low section that is flooded

in the rainy season by the river of *Los Putos* [Putah Creek],\* a tributary of the Sacramento, and forms an immense lagoon, around which, from January to July, it is necessary to make a detour towards the north to reach the high banks of the Sacramento, which may then be followed toward the south as far as the landing. In this season, however, all of this section was dry and with the Indian guide that M. Sutter had given me I was able to go straight across it. According to the mark that I saw, this body of water must be more than three leagues wide and it is from this and other similar marshes, almost all of them formed by the overflowing of the Sacramento's western tributaries, that arise the miasmas which cause fevers and make all the vicinity of the Sacramento so unhealthful and so dangerous a place for white people to live in during the summer months.

\*The river of *Los Putos* or *los liguitos* [Putah Creek], like the *Jesus Maria* River [perhaps Cache Creek], are not tributaries of the Sacramento, strictly speaking, for they both lose their identity in the marshes to the west of the Sacramento, and their waters form a lake during the rainy season and as late as July, and it is only when this lake overflows that the water reaches the Sacramento. (Moerenhout's note.)

This day's journey was a repetition of that of the 15th of July when I 35 went from the Arroyo Seco to the Cosumnes River--an immense plain, all in flames, and a burning sun. One could hardly breathe. Toward eleven o'clock we came to a stream where the fire had spared quite a considerable space and where there was some grass and some shade. I had the horses unsaddled, intending to let the worst heat of the day pass before starting out again, although from there to Vaca's place was still about six or seven leagues. Toward four o'clock, the heat having lessened considerably, we took to the road again. Two leagues from there we crossed the *Putos* River [Putah Creek], in which there was very little water. It was nearly night when we arrived at Vaca's farm, which is situated at the western end of the plain in a little valley between the first hills.

#### *From the 5th to the 12th of August*

Having found a horse for the price of eighty dollars, payable at Monterey, I sent back M. Sutter's Indian and the horse that I had hired at the Fort. Don [Manuel] Vaca's farm is near the main road from the Sacramento to the Strait, to Suisun Bay, Napa and Sonoma valleys, etc. On the way to these places one goes through charming country, but since it is necessary to cross the rather high

hills that form and divide the valleys of Suisun and Napa from Sonoma Valley, the journey is long and tiresome.

Suisun Valley is beautiful but less so than the valleys of Napa and Sonoma that are among the most beautiful and most fertile regions of Upper California, and it was there especially that the Americans who have come to this country during the past two years wanted to locate.

At Sonoma, or San Francisco Solano, where there were not more than five or six houses a year and a half ago, there are now more than sixty, and had it not been for recent events the plan of a large city subdivided into lots would have been carried out within a few years. But since the discovery of the gold region the progress of this town, like that of Yerba Buena and of Monterey and of the Pueblo of San Jose, has been suddenly brought to a standstill. Now, instead of its population increasing, it has lost two-thirds of its inhabitants. Most of its houses are empty, all work has stopped and there, as everywhere else, there is not a single carpenter left nor a joiner nor a blacksmith nor any laborer to do the least work. All have gone to the Placer or have come back from there too rich and too independent to resume their trades or to work for any man whomsoever.

The Napa Valley, like that of Sonoma, is about twelve leagues long by about two to four in width. The latter leads into Santa Rosa Valley and the two of them into the country to the north that is said to be of great beauty. In both of these valleys are constant streams of considerable size that flow through their whole length and connect with San Francisco Bay by creeks into which small schooners may enter.\* They are also watered over their whole extent by many little brooks that flow down from all the 36 mountain sides. To these great advantages must be added those of an extremely fertile soil and a mild healthful climate equal in all respects to the so much and so justly praised climate of the San Juan plain. Thus, going through this beautiful country, seeing these fertile virgin lands, this mild climate favorable to the cultivation of fruits and produce of all zones; this easy communication with the great and beautiful bay of San Francisco, navigable by vessels of any size from its entrance or from the port of *San Solito* [Sausalito] to the mouths of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers one is impressed with the idea of the future greatness and prosperity of this country. Though it may be momentarily retarded in its progress by the very excess of its riches,

nevertheless it cannot fail soon to acquire a large population and to become within a few years the richest, the most flourishing, and the most powerful state on this coast.

28. The Napa River and Sonoma Creek. Petaluma Creek connects with Santa Rosa Valley.

From Sonoma to Carquinez Strait the road is difficult, but M. Guadalupe Vallejo, the former Commander of the northern department of Upper California who had shown me a thousand courtesies during my short stay with him at Sonoma, also had the kindness to give me a guide as far as Benicia or the Strait. M. Vallejo is married, has a large and charming family that he is rearing as best he can in a country where it is only possible to obtain mediocre tutors. He is the richest landowner of Upper California. He has several farms, more than 15,000 cattle, and 5,000 horses, and his large and handsome house is the only well-furnished one that I have seen in this country.

Before reaching Carquinez Strait and the new town of Benicia one goes through a labyrinth of dreary hills that are barely covered with a little grass, and this region, although not entirely arid, is very bare and so entirely without trees or other wood that there is not even enough for the use of its few inhabitants.

The project of building a city on the northwest side of Carquinez Strait to attract vessels and commerce as a connecting link between the north and south parts of San Francisco Bay was conceived by an American, a M. Simple [Robert Semple]<sup>\*</sup> and M. Guadalupe Vallejo, who is the owner of all the surrounding territory and had a great interest in attracting settlers there. But one may not thus change at will the trend of affairs and the course of trade. Yerba Buena, besides, is in a fortunate position, a short distance from the entrance to the bay and at a place to which ships may come in all seasons of the year with the aid of good charts and without the need of a pilot and from which they may return to the sea with equal facility. Whereas to go up to the Strait and to the city of Benicia not only is the navigation difficult and dangerous but it would be almost impossible for a large ship to get back through the entrance of the Strait on its return, to which must be added that on account of the currents there is no safe and easy anchorage at the proposed city.

29. Robert Semple, a Kentuckian who came to California in 1845, was prominent both by his gigantic size and his versatile activity. Legend has it that in going to and from Benicia, if the ferry was not handy he would wade across Carquinez Strait. Dentist, printer, promoter, filibuster and statesman in the rough, he was one of the leaders of

the Bear Flag revolt; founded (with Walter Colton) the State's first newspaper, the *Californian*, was president of the Constitutional Convention of '49; and left as his legacy to posterity a monumental History of California in three pages. See Bancroft, *History of California*, V, 715; Day, Mrs. F. H., "Life of Semple," *Hesperian*, Nov. 1859, p. 386; Radcliffe, Zoe Green, "Robert Baylor Semple, Pioneer," in *California Historical Society Quarterly*, VI, 2, p. 130; Francis, J. D., "Robert Semple, an Early-day California Promoter," *California History Nugget*, IV, 1, pp. 1-7.

37

Thus, despite the articles in favor of this town that have appeared in the *Californian*, a newspaper published by M. Simple, and despite the assistance of one of the most influential business men of the country, M. [Thomas O.] Larkin, the former American Consul, \* the port of Benicia is still virgin, and the city consists of but five or six houses erected by Messrs. Simple, Larkin, and other interested parties. It is probable that the project of establishing the city and a port there at the Strait would already have been entirely abandoned had it not been for the discovery of the gold region that suddenly established active communication between the north and south of this country and attracted thousands of people to the Sacramento and its tributaries to the north who in going there with wagons, animals, effects, merchandise, etc., constantly used the ferries, filled the few houses of the new city with people, gave life to it, and for the time being made it flourish.

30. Thomas O. Larkin, a Yankee trader who came to Monterey in 1831, was the leading business man of the territory when appointed American Consul in '43. He served in that capacity with great diplomacy and tact, and his reports and other papers preserved in the Bancroft Library are among the most important and reliable sources for the history of the period. At the time of Moerenhout's writing he was engaged in land speculation on a considerable scale and amassed a large fortune--but not from Benicia! Bancroft, *History of California*, IV, 706-7; Kelsey, R. W., *The United States Consulate in California*, Pub. of Academy of Pacific Coast History, Vol. I, No. 5 (biographical material on pp. 7-8, 247-93).

These events have greatly changed its position and give it some promise for the future, for several of the northern provinces are entirely separated from those to the south by San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento River, and the place where the new town has been established is well chosen for communication between the two districts. Nowhere can this barrier be more easily crossed than at the Strait itself, and also, as before mentioned, one may go there from Monterey and from the more southerly parts of the state by a continuous chain of valleys and by roads as easy as they are beautiful. It therefore seems that, while Yerba Buena will always remain the principal port of San Francisco Bay and the commercial center of all Northern California, Benicia has escaped the desuetude to which it had seemed destined and it will probably acquire some importance after

the population of California has increased and after a steam ferry can be substituted for the large flat sail-boats and row-boats that are now in use and that cannot withstand the violent winds and currents in this narrow passage and often take days to cross or, carried away by the currents or the winds, are in danger of being cast ashore and lost on the beaches or the islands in Suisun Bay or at the mouth of the Sacramento.

When I arrived at Benicia on the 9th of July [August] at about four o'clock in the afternoon, I found that there was only one boat left. The largest had gone adrift in Suisun Bay\*\* and the remaining one was at the other side, but fortunately it returned during the night, and at noon of the 10th I went aboard with three other travelers and our horses. The winds and the tide being favorable, within twenty-five minutes we were on the opposite shore.

\*The larger of these two boats had several times been lost in this same manner. They are then obliged to cast oxen, horses, and all other cargo into the sea and even passengers have lost their lives in these shipwrecks. (Moerenhout's note.)

The usual landing place on the south-southeast side of the Strait is at the very entrance of the plain *orllanito*, little valley, and is the only place where it is possible to embark or disembark with wagons. But when there are only 38 passengers and horses and the weather permits they try to draw up directly across from the Benicia landing. From there to the valley the only road is a steep and narrow path where one is obliged to go afoot and lead his horse.

On coming into the valley I was struck by its desolate state. Since leaving the Moquelumne River I had almost constantly been going through burned districts, still smouldering or partly ruined by fire, but nowhere had I seen such complete and general destruction--the valley, the mountains, all were black and frightful in appearance. Nothing had been spared. The wheat, the crops, had been burned; the trees were leafless; and over a space of more than eight leagues there was not a blade of grass to be seen, not an animal, not a living being. It was a dreary desert from which all had fled and where neither men nor animals could find the slightest nourishment.

Upper California has always been exposed to these fires, for its plains and its mountains are covered with grass and wild oats which toward July are quite dry and will catch fire from the slightest spark.

The least thing--a cigar tossed into the fields, the discharge of a rifle--is enough to set all aflame and to cause the most terrible fires. To this it must be added that the Indians, after they have made their harvest of wild grain, frequently set fire to the grass either intending to improve the next year's crop or to kill the rabbits, the hares, and other animals that they eat.

Formerly, when one of these fires approached a Mission, a farm, or some inhabited place, both whites and Indians joined and tried to stop the progress of the flames by uprooting shrubbery and clearing a certain space from grass, etc., or by any other means, so that these fires were then never so extensive or so destructive. This year, however, the roads are constantly filled with travelers who camp in the middle of the woods and the fields and, without taking the slightest precautions, light fires there that they fail to put out when they leave. In consequence, during the past two months fires have been almost general in the whole country and the ruin that they have caused is the more complete since the abandoned and deserted farms and those tended only by women have no means of stopping the progress of the fire, and in many places it has not only destroyed the pastures but also, as in this valley, the grain and all the products of the fields.

It was nine o'clock in the evening when we finally arrived at a place where there were some people.

It was Don Juan Soto<sup>\*</sup> and his sons and they were living in *anenramada*, a branch covered shack. Their house and their wheat had been burned and they had built this hut to shelter themselves while they protected a field of corn from the cattle that could find no more pasturage and were wandering at large and attacking the fields of corn and of beans that, being still green, had partly escaped destruction by the fire. They offered me the best hospitality that they could in their miserable habitation, though except for fresh meat they had absolutely nothing to offer. They themselves slept on the ground, little sheltered from the cold northwest winds that blew strongly all night.

31. Juan Soto was a soldier in the San Francisco company from 1819 to 1824. In 1841 he was living in San Jose, aged 55. His wife was Petra Pacheco and they had several children including Ignacio and Silverio Soto who appear in the Contra Costa County history as possessors of a 1,000-acre tract, part of the San Miguel rancho in the Ygnacio Valley. Bancroft, *History of California*, V, 729; *History of Contra Costa County*, San Francisco: W. A. Slocum & Co., 1882, pp. 673-74.

39

## ON THE ROAD TO THE MINES

ENCAMPING FOR THE NIGHT From the Dutch editin of Ryan's *Adventures in California*, reporduced throught the courtesy of Mr. Carl Hoffman.)

On the 11th before sunrise we were on our way to San José. It was about five or six leagues to the Mission and eleven to the Pueblo. As we went on we came into some regions that had escaped the fire and by their beauty made the terrible destruction seem the more regrettable. Toward the southern extremity of the valley where the two roads leading to the Strait and to the San Joaquin meet the fire had been stopped by the *Arroyo de Adentro* (inland stream), its ravages had altogether ceased, and this region still appeared in all its richness and beauty.\*<sup>\*</sup>

\*The son of M. [Antonio María] Suñol,<sup>\*</sup> to whom this beautiful spot belongs and who has a farm and many cattle, assured me afterwards that more than twenty times during six weeks he had been obliged to go there with Indians to extinguish fire set to the grass by the negligence of travelers, and he feared every moment the same fate as the other farmers of this valley--to see all his fields and his pastures destroyed by fire. (Moerenhout's note.)

32. Antonio María Suñol, born in Barcelona, had served in the French navy and deserted from the *Bordelais* in California in 1818. He owned the rancho San José del Valle and other properties and was interested in the quicksilver mines at New Almaden. De Mofras found him (1841) "*sous-préfet*" of San Jose, and said of him: "M. Suñol speaks our language very well, and is very devoted to France; he has two farms and many cattle; he runs a business that gives him great importance in the country, and he will be able to assist French ships arriving at San Francisco or at Monte Rey." Mofras, *op. cit. supra*, 1, 414. His daughter Paula was the wife of Don Pedro Sainsevain. The son mentioned was probably José Suñol, who was killed by a squatter on the rancho in 1855. Bancroft, *History of California*, V, 738, 709.

At ten o'clock we arrived at the Mission where we found many people coming and going from the Placer, for this is the route by which all must pass whether they go by way of the Strait or of the San Joaquin. We stopped there only to take a little nourishment. It was two o'clock in the afternoon when I returned to M. [Antonio María] Suñol's at the Pueblo of San José, after an absence of one month to the day. The day after my arrival at the Pueblo, the 12th of July [August], was the feast day of Santa Clara and there was a special service at the Mission a mile from the Pueblo and a gathering of people that astonished me, but M. Suñol informed me that almost all the men of the Pueblo and of the environs had returned from the Placer to be present at the feast. He reckoned that from two to three hundred at least had come home within the week. A good many Americans

and other foreigners had also returned and he thought that all together there were not less than five hundred and that they had each, or on the average, brought back with them a thousand dollars in gold. This value of half a million dollars in the hands of so many individuals disposed to spend a large part of it had immediately emptied all the shops and the stores; not a yard of cloth nor any other merchandise remained in the market place and gold was already being exchanged for silver at the rate of from 8 to 10 dollars for an ounce.

One can hardly conceive of the extraordinary changes occasioned in the condition and character of the people of this country by the discovery of the gold region. In Upper California there have never been any poor in the true sense of the word--that is to say, people in need. With the abundance of cattle and the extreme fertility of the soil no one ever lacks for food, but money was hardly known. What people needed for their persons or their houses, they obtained in exchange for hides, tallow, etc., and those who had ever possessed as much as five hundred or a thousand dollars were extremely rare in Upper California. Whereas now the lowliest, the most unfortunate among them, finds himself in possession of that much or of a much greater sum, obtained over night and with such ease that it seems of little importance to him and he parts with it and spends it with indifference and prodigality. The extraordinary thing is that the Americans themselves seem all to come back with the same disposition, spend extravagantly, throw away gold by the handful and assume an air of prodigious importance and generosity.

*From the 14th to the 16th of July [August]*

Having learned today that a Chilean ship, the *Sixth of June*, was to leave in two days from the port of Yerba Buena for Valparaiso, I profited by the offer of a Frenchman who was going to Yerba Buena to have put on board a little box of gold samples from the different gold regions and of other objects that I had procured during my journey and which I addressed to Your Excellency, as I had the honor to inform you by the letter that accompanied it.

On the morning of the 15th I left the Pueblo for Monterey, but it was a day's journey to the Mission of San Juan. The 16th I continued on my way over the *Sierra de San Juan*, a difficult, long and

extremely tiresome climb for the horses. In the *Plaine de la Nation* [Rancho Nacional]<sup>\*</sup> I found the farms and the villages almost entirely abandoned--the only inhabitants were a few women and children--and on entering Monterey I was struck by the silence that reigned there. Not a ship was in port, not a soul was to be seen in the streets, and I soon learned that all the men, Californians and foreigners, had left for the gold regions, and the Governor alone remained with a few officers, that the soldiers had deserted, and that there remained hardly enough to mount guard at the fort.<sup>\*</sup>

33. Nacional, a rancho of 6633.29 acres granted to Vicente Cantua in 1839, included what is now the city of Salinas and ran from about Hilltown, along the Salinas River to Blanco or the Cocks tract. During Spanish rule, the land had been designated as the king's pasture because of the rich feed in the Salinas Valley (most of the stock from Carmel Mission were pastured here), but by the time the grant was made Mexico had succeeded Spain as owner of California, and since names which had any connection with a king were out of favor, it was named *nacional*, or "national." "Historical Episodes," *Salinas Daily Post*, March 20, 1934.

34. The Governor, Col. R. B. Mason, in his report to the Adjutant General written on the same day as Moerenhout's letter states (*31st Cong., 1st Sess., House Ex. Doc. No. 17, p. 533*):

"The discovery of these vast deposits of gold has entirely changed the character of Upper California. Its people, before engaged in cultivating their small patches of ground and guarding their herds of cattle and horses, have all gone to the mines, or are on their way thither; laborers of every trade have left their work-benches, and tradesmen their shops; sailors desert their ships as fast as they arrive on the coast, and several vessels have gone to sea with hardly enough hands to spread a sail; two or three are now at anchor in San Francisco with no crews on board. Many desertions, too, have taken place from the garrisons within the influence of the mines; 26 soldiers have deserted from the post of Sonoma, 24 from that of San Francisco, and 24 from Monterey. For a few days the evil appeared so threatening that great danger existed that the garrisons would leave in a body; . . . laboring men at the mines can now earn in *one day* more than double a soldier's pay and allowances for a month, and even the pay of a lieutenant or captain cannot hire a servant. A carpenter or mechanic would not listen to an offer of less than fifteen or twenty dollars a day . . . A soldier of the artillery company returned here a few days ago from the mines, having been absent on furlough twenty days; he made by trading and working during that time \$1,500."

I have the honor of being, with the deepest respect, M. le Ministre,

Your very humble and very obedient servant,

The Consul of France,

J. A. MOERENHOUT.

DOCUMENT IV<sup>\*</sup>

1. Box Monterey; Correspondence de M. Moerenhout, No. 17, received Feb. 23, 1849.

MOERENHOUT TO MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Monterey

Monsieur le Ministre: October 15, 1848

On the 17th of last August I had the honor of addressing to Your Excellency a report<sup>\*</sup> on the journey that I had just made in the northern part of Upper California, the principal object of which was to visit the gold regions that had recently been discovered in this country. These discoveries, far from decreasing, are constantly extending both to the north and to the south, but the spots most noted now for their richness and to which most people are going are the rivers Cosumnes, Mokelumne, Stanislaus, Merced,<sup>\*</sup> 41 and the source of the San Joaquin, together with the hills and gulches that separate or lie between these rivers.

2. Document No. III, *supra*, pp. 4, *et seq.*

3. In the copyist's transcription *Cosunmes*, *Moquelomes*, *San Stanislau* and *la Merced*. The names of these rivers are hereinafter rendered in their modern spelling.

Just as I was writing this two Frenchmen, the Messrs. Fourcade,<sup>\*</sup> presented themselves at the Consulate on their return from the Placer with seventy pounds of gold. Two other Frenchmen who were working with them but who have remained at the Pueblo of San Jose have a like sum; that is to say, one of them, named Cinquantin, has forty pounds, and the other one, whose name

I do not know, twenty-eight pounds. Nearly all this gold comes from a single gulch, about four hundred yards long and located about four leagues north of the Stanislaus. It has produced more than \$150,000. The most extraordinary thing is that this gold has been obtained without washing the dirt, for as water is entirely lacking there at this season they gather nothing but the large pieces and the grains that are visible and easy to pick up. It seems that in that region all the hills and the gulches between them are, as at the dry diggings, so extraordinarily rich in gold that one must have seen with his own eyes in order to believe it. The Messrs. Fourcade on some days made a thousand, fifteen hundred, and even as much as two thousand dollars each.

4. Albert Richard Fourcade and John R. Fourcade were residents of Monterey as early as 1840-41. A. Fourcade was one of the petitioners for the establishment of the French Consulate there. The Fourcade brothers mined at Mokelumne Hill, in company with many other Frenchmen. Bancroft, *History of California*, III, 745; "The French Consulate in California," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. XI, p. 203, n. 32; Lévy, *Les Français en Californie*, San Francisco, 1884, p. 92.

During the past month or six weeks the number of gold miners has considerably increased, for with the exception of a few who are ill, almost all of those who had abandoned the work during the months of July and August, for fear of sickness or for other reasons, have returned. Since then, also, 400 people have come from New Mexico, 800 inhabitants of Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, etc., have gone to the mines, and to this number must be added 300 disbanded volunteer soldiers discharged during the past two months, 300 others recently arrived from Lower California, 500 deserters from the troops and from the various ships, and 200 people who have come from the Sandwich Islands and from Oregon. All together, it is safe to say that 4000 white men and 2,000 Indians are now mining for gold and that the daily yield is at least from 8,000 to 10,000 pounds. This extraordinary influx into the north has carried all the business with it and left the southern part deserted, inactive, and almost without resources. Except for warships, even Monterey no longer sees any vessels. Not one out of ten of the merchant vessels coming to Upper California drops anchor there. The Bay of San Francisco and its environs, the Pueblo of San Jose, and New Helvetia on the Sacramento, are the centers of activity and of commercial transactions. Yerba Buena is the port to which all the ships go and where all purchases are made. This state of affairs has obliged the Governor, without actually changing the capital, nevertheless to change his residence provisionally. He left Monterey at the beginning of this month to go to New Helvetia<sup>\*</sup> and later to stay for some time at the Pueblo

of San José. The latter is truly the most suitable place for the establishment of the capital and of the government, for it is so beautifully and advantageously situated near the southern extremity of San Francisco Bay, almost equidistant from Monterey and from Yerba Buena, and is the principal center of travel from south to north and north to south, from which regular communication may best be maintained with the two principal ports, with New Helvetia, with the gold regions, and with all the northern and southern parts of the country. This move on the part of the Governor and the changes that have taken place in the course of trade may oblige me also to move my residence provisionally to the Pueblo of San Jose without actually changing the Consulate, and, if I find a person worthy of confidence, to name an agent at Yerba Buena; all in order that I may be able to give you more prompt information on the state of the country and of what is happening here.

5. Governor Mason left Monterey shortly after Oct. 5. On the 11th he was camped by the San Joaquin and on the 24th was at New Helvetia. *31st Cong., 1st Sess., House Ex. Doc. No. 17, pp. 676-77.*

Early this month the ship *Ohio*, Commodore [Thomas Ap Catesby] Jones, and the sloops *Warren* and *Dale* arrived here with 300 volunteers, also three transports with 400 inhabitants of Lower California who, having declared themselves in favor of the Americans, have been obliged to leave their country. Among them are the former Governor, M. Palacio, several other Mexican Government employees, and a Catholic priest. They have all been transported here at the expense of the United States Government, which, moreover, has indemnified them for the loss of their houses, lands, cattle, etc., and has furnished them food and lodging here for two months.

Trade continues very active. At Monterey itself a French ship that took the Peruvian flag in China, *Le Pacifique*, commanded by M. Laurenul, a former naval student, has sold \$28,000 worth of goods in a few days. Purchases made at Yerba Buena during the months of July, August, and September were in excess of \$300,000, and merchandise of all kinds is still in demand. This increase in purchases and sales is due to the fact that most of the inhabitants of this country who had almost always been deprived of everything except food suddenly and for the first time find themselves in a position to satisfy all their needs and even their whims. Then, too, the Indians of the Sacramento and Tulare valleys and those of the Sierra Nevada are beginning to work on their own account and to exchange their gold for provisions and commodities at exorbitant prices. This trade

is constantly increasing and could well become very advantageous for there are to be satisfied the needs of 30,000 to 50,000 people who instead of using what they buy squander it as soon as they get it.

I therefore think, Monsieur le Ministre, that one or two cargoes made up in accordance with the note that I had the honor to write Your Excellency, and even considerably increasing all the articles of food and clothing, would sell very well at any time and such ventures could not fail to yield a good profit. I must, however, inform Your Excellency that to anchor in the ports of this country now exposes the owners and operators of vessels to great trouble and serious losses on account of desertion. Nearly all of the ships that have come here during the past three months have lost their crews. Several are 43 detained here for lack of men, and although wages of \$50 to \$ 100 per month are offered to sailors, there are none to be found. \* . . .

6. A passage dealing with the "Panaud affair" is omitted. See *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. XII, pp. 331-33.

I have the honor to be, Monsieur le Ministre,

Your most respectful, very humble and obedient servant,

J. A. MOERENHOUT, Consul of France.

#### DOCUMENT V\*

1. Box Monterey; Correspondence de M. Moerenhout, No. 18, *duplicata*.

#### MOERENHOUT TO MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Monterey,

Monsieur le Ministre: November 25, 1848

The commerce of this country is constantly increasing and Yerba Buena, on San Francisco Bay, having become the principal port of Upper California, the place where all merchant vessels go,

where the new commercial houses are being established, where all purchases are made, and from whence goods are transported to New Helvetia on the Sacramento, to the gold regions, and to all the northern part of this country, I concluded, as I had the honor to inform Your Excellency by my dispatch of the 15th of last October, that I should name a consular agent with residence at Yerba Buena. The person to whom I have entrusted this post is named Etienne Jourdain, and is a native of Besançon.\* His appointment dates from the 15th of this month. M. Jourdain has been living in Upper California for eighteen months and is worthy of recommendation both for his talents and his conduct. I therefore hope that Your Excellency may see fit to approve and confirm this appointment.

2. Étienne Jourdain arrived in Los Angeles in 1847. He established a hotel in San José. Ernest de Massey stopped there in 1850 and said that it was "the first hotel in the village." Jourdain evidently preferred this profitable business to the empty honors of the consular agency, for he never took up the duties of the position. Bancroft, *op. cit.*, IV, 695; De Massey, *A Frenchman in the Gold Rush* (Calif. Hist. Soc., 1927), pp. 136, 154. See Moerenhout to Minister, March 30, 1849, *infra*. The original of this letter (Nov. 25, 1848) bears the ministerial notation: "I believe it will be necessary to establish the consulate at Yerba Buena and leave the San Francisco agency to M. [Edouard] Guys" who had been named consular agent at San Francisco but did not arrive until November, 1849.

By an approximate estimate, the purchases made on board the ships at Yerba Buena during the months of July, August, September, and October, amount to nearly 2,000,000 francs. The sales are made for cash or on fifteen to thirty days time with good security and payable in specie or in placer gold at \$16 an ounce.

Despite these large sales, goods are lacking or sell for exorbitant prices. At Monterey, to which the merchant vessels no longer come, the stores are empty and the few goods that are brought here from Yerba Buena are sold at from 30 to 50 per cent. above Yerba Buena prices. It is the same in all the other southern ports and, the coastwise trade being permitted only to vessels under the American flag, the freight from Yerba Buena to Monterey is at the rate of from \$40 to \$50 per ton. These high prices and all this ferment are due to the immense values that are constantly being put in circulation, for the quantity of gold in the hands of the Californians and foreign inhabitants is incalculable. The price of this metal has nevertheless increased. Some ships having arrived from Mazatlan and other Mexican ports with funds, the price of gold instead of being from eight to ten is now from ten to twelve dollars per troy ounce.

Judging from this state of affairs it is probable that for a long time yet this country will be an excellent market for ships coming from Europe. It is therefore to be hoped that some shipments have been sent from France, or that they be promptly sent, with cargoes made up according to the note I had the honor to send you, but increasing considerably the quantity of wines and brandies, the consumption of which is extraordinary and still increasing daily. Brandy now sells for \$8 to \$10 a gallon, wine from \$2 to \$5; wines are almost entirely lacking; flour sells from \$25 to \$30 per barrel; *bisquit fin* at \$15 and \$20 per cwt.; hams, tongues, preserved meats, sardines, etc., are not to be had; it is the same with ready made clothing, especially woollens. Everything is lacking -- materials, clothing, liquors, and provisions -- and two or three cargoes of from 300,000 to 500,000 francs would sell at from 100% to 200% profit. If any ships come out from France it is important that they should touch at Monterey, where a well-assorted cargo up to \$100,000 in value would easily sell at from 20% to 30% above the Yerba Buena prices.

As I had suspected, and as I announced in the report that I had the honor to send you, gold is now found in all the gulches between the foothills of the Sierra Nevada from the American River to the Feather River and on up to the extreme north of California where this type of country (rounded hills 100 to 600 feet high) seems to end or is broken by the large chains of mountains that branch off from the Sierra Nevada and extend westward to the sea. Thus the known gold-bearing regions, in which mining has been conducted on a considerable scale, now extend 120 leagues from north to south, and gold is found there in all the gulches, in all the streams, and in all the hills over a width of 4 to 5 leagues; this without including the gold that is carried down by the rivers and the finest particles of which are found for 10 or 12 leagues into the valley. Despite the approach of the rainy season the mining operations are being continued avidly. More than 500 houses have been built in the different sections where washing for gold is carried on and more than 2,000 people propose to continue this work and to winter there.

The influx of immigrants is daily increasing; 12,000 to 15,000 have just arrived from Oregon and 500 to 600 from Lower California and Sonora. The ships from the Sandwich Islands, from Mexico,

and from Valparaiso are filled with passengers for Yerba Buena. There are no longer houses enough at the Pueblo of San José to lodge all the foreigners and when the rainy season obliges a large number of those who are still at the Placer to return, many people will be without shelter, and, what is more serious, there will not be food enough for them. At Yerba Buena and at the Pueblo of San José, houses and land rent for exorbitant prices. Lots that the local authorities granted twelve or eighteen months ago for \$ 16, and that have only 48 to 75 feet frontage, have been sold for \$10,000 and as much as \$15,000.

45

But in the midst of all this most extraordinary prosperity vices are creeping in and advancing by great strides, especially drunkenness and gambling. The latter has already increased to a truly frightful extent. At Yerba Buena, at the Pueblo of San José, at Monterey, every public house, every saloon, is a den where gambling goes on night and day and where very large sums are put at risk. It is most distressing to see how general this vice has become among the Californians and even among the Americans. It is to be feared that there will soon result from this a general corruption and disorders that will be all the worse since the government, far from being able to arrest the progress of the evil, is without courts, without police, without military force, and without any means of executing the laws and of running down and punishing crimes and misdemeanors.\* . . .

3. A passage omitted at this point deals with the suppression of the Consulate and recall of Moerenhout, of which he has heard by a letter from Rear-Admiral Le Gourant de Tromelin, dated at Valparaiso, Sept. 16, 1848. See footnote 22 to Introduction. Moerenhout protests that if this be true it will complete the ruin of his affairs, already embarrassed by the rise in prices altogether out of proportion to his salary.

I pray Your Excellency to receive the assurance of my respect,

The Consul of the French Republic, J. A. MOERENHOUT

P. S. Enclosed I have the honor to send Your Excellency No. 14 of the *Californian*, which I have just received, and a letter from M. Panaut [Clément Panaud]. This Frenchman two months ago did not have a thousand dollars. Your Excellency will note that in addition to this sum he says that he now has eighty-five pounds of gold.\*

4. This is the French merchant of Santa Cruz the seizure of whose property by Frémont in 1846, coupled with the latter's insolence toward the French consul, gave rise to a minor diplomatic incident. See *Calif Hist. Soc. Quarterly*, Vol. XII, p. 170-72, 331-33. Panaud's letter was found with the Consul's. After asking Moerenhout to attend to some business for him he says that he did good business in the Placer and came back with 85 pounds of gold and \$1,000 in silver.

## DOCUMENT VI<sup>\*</sup>

1. Box Monterey, Correspondence de M. Moerenhout, No. 19.

### MOERENHOUT TO MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Yerba Buena

Monsieur Le Ministre: January 20, 1849

I have the honor of addressing to you this letter, together with the duplicate of my letter of November 25, from the port of Yerba Buena, San Francisco Bay, where I arrived two days ago. \*

2. In the passage omitted at this point Moerenhout tells how, after leaving Monterey at the end of December, he was turned from his original intention of going to San José by a request for his intervention in favor of a Sardinian, Amelotti, who was having some difficulties with the customs authorities over the seizure of a shipment of sugar. Moerenhout succeeded in settling the matter. He reports that, judging by the amount of duty collected, \$209,165, the imports of the past six months must have amounted to \$600,000 to \$700,000 at least.

Winter and bad weather having interrupted communication with the Sacramento and gold regions where, according to the latest news, the snow has stopped all work, business transactions have much diminished in this port and the price of some articles has even fallen considerably.

Flour, which sold two months ago for \$25 or \$30, may now be bought for from \$10 to \$12 per 200 pounds. But the drop in price of this and all other commodities is occasioned particularly by the enormous cost of warehousing, for despite the fact that this place, which did not count thirty houses ten years ago, now has a population of from 2,000 to 3,000 souls and more than 250 houses, the great quantity of merchandise and the many passengers that arrive here every day render these buildings totally insufficient and have raised the rents to such exorbitant prices that it is impossible to land cargoes or to keep unsold goods for any length of time in the stores.

It therefore seems to me that this fall in price as well as that which will 46 probably result in the case of merchandise in general will be only temporary and that in the spring or toward the months of April and May, when the bulk of the population will again set out for the gold region, such great quantities of provisions and merchandise will be taken out and the needs of all points in the Placer will be so great that all commodities generally used or consumed will immediately rise in value and sell at prices that will yield considerable profit and render shipments to this country safer and more profitable than to any other.

There are now twenty merchant ships in port, with new arrivals every day and twenty to thirty more vessels expected from Chile, Peru, Mexico, from the Islands and from China. The ships from the United States and from Europe also will be arriving before long. It is thus probable that this country will soon be flooded with merchandise and a considerable drop in prices is the more certain in that, as I have said above, there is a lack of storehouses, all communication with the interior has been interrupted, and in that the business men, who have placed large orders in all countries, have sent a large part of their capital abroad.

But despite this somewhat disturbing perspective and the unfortunate result that this state of things may have for some of the ships that arrive here before the months of April and May, some of which may have to lie here at anchor or take their cargoes elsewhere, it remains probable that there will be such a movement, such increased demand and market in the spring, as soon as the communication with the interior has been opened and the work in the placers begun again, that it seems to me certain that business will again resume its former activity, that the price of merchandise will immediately rise and it will once more sell for very high prices.

It is also to be noted that with the number of emigrants who will be arriving from everywhere, provisions will be very scarce or altogether lacking, regardless of how much may be brought in. It will be the same with beverages, manufactured goods, blankets, cooking utensils, etc., etc. More than 3,000 emigrants from Sonora, Mexico have already arrived, and they all assure us that more than 20,000 are preparing to come to California before April or May. Half the population of Oregon

will arrive about the same time.\* In the United States thousands of people are getting ready to come by all routes and, as I have said above, all the ships from Chile, Mexico, the Islands, and from China are filled with passengers. It is also to be borne in mind, M. le Ministre, that all these people, who will not be less than 50,000 to 60,000 during the course of the year, will arrive here totally unsupplied and will in a few days find themselves in a position and with more than sufficient resources to be able to satisfy all their needs, and that, as in the case of the 20,000 white inhabitants already in this country, they will catch the flair for spending and for spending without restraint as soon as they arrive. I, therefore, think that notwithstanding the great quantity 47 of goods that will be imported and the momentary fall in prices that may be experienced, business will pick up as soon as the outlets open into the interior and will again become very good....\*

3. Burnett thought "that at least two-thirds of the male population of Oregon, capable of bearing arms, started for California in the summer and fall of 1848." Burnett, P. H., *Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer*, N. Y., 1880, p. 254.

4. The omitted passage deals with the inadequacy of the Consul's salary to meet the enormously increased cost of living. It is impossible to live at Yerba Buena, he says, even in the most simple and retiring manner, for less than 25,000 francs per year. The only alternative is to go into business, but he does not think that consistent with the disinterested position that he should occupy.

I pray Your Excellency to receive the assurance of my greatest respect,

The Consul of the French Republic,

J. A. MOERENHOUT

PENCIL SKETCH OF SAN FRANCISCO. 1849 Made by P.F. Ewer, father of Ferdinand C. Ewer.

49

## **PART FOUR**

*In which Moerenhout advises the French Minister of Foreign Affairs concerning conditions in California during the spring, summer and fall of 1849 resulting from the discovery of Gold, writing both from San Francisco, where he had assumed the duties of Consul, and from Monterey.*

## DOCUMENT

\*

1. Box Monterey; Correspondance de M. Moerenhout, No. 20.

### MOERENHOUT TO MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Port of Yerba Buena

San Francisco Bay

Monsieur le Ministre: February 15, 1849.

By my letter of the 20th January<sup>\*</sup> last, I had the honor to inform you of my arrival at Yerba Buena and to give you some information as to the present state of this port and of its commerce. Since that time I have obtained exact data regarding the shipping at the port and the increase of its business, and I now have the honor to send you enclosed herewith a list of the ships that entered here during the latter half of 1848, their tonnage, the amount of customs duties levied, and the approximate amount of the sales made during the same period.<sup>\*</sup>

2. Doc. VI, *supra*, p. 45.

3. The list was not found. See the list of vessels in Bancroft, *Hist. of Calif.*, V, 576-81. A sheet enclosed with this letter gave the following information: Number of ships that visited Yerba Buena during the last six months of 1848, 47, of which there were 14 American, 15 Hawaiian, 9 Chilian, 4 English, 2 Peruvian, and one each French, Tahitian and Russian. Duty collected, \$169,135.08, uncollected, \$40,000; total duty, \$209,135. Value of cargoes sold from the 47 ships, \$1,150,000.

In my last I also observed that with the exception of flour and some other bulky articles the prices of goods were holding up despite the frequent arrivals of vessels and the interruption of communication with the interior and with the gold region due to the severity of the winter and the bad weather. To these remarks I added that the drop in price of the articles first mentioned seemed to me caused by the lack of customs warehouses and the enormous charges made for unloading and storage. My short stay in this port has convinced me that this judgment as to the state of the market was well founded, so for hardly had the weather improved a bit and favorable winds permitted the

transportation of goods up the Sacramento, to New Helvetia and other interior points, than business immediately resumed its usual activity. Flour, which had dropped as low as ten dollars the sack of two hundred Spanish pounds, went up again to eighteen and twenty dollars, and there was an increase of ten to twenty per cent. on provisions, spirits and all articles of general consumption.

But, despite this stimulus that a period of extraordinarily good weather has given to business here, and notwithstanding that hundreds of people immediately set out for the Placer, the storehouses of New Helvetia being still crowded with merchandise and provisions and the roads being still too bad to permit of transporting them to the gold regions, it is probable that the commerce of this port will languish again. The slightest change of weather, rain and south winds will stop navigation on the bay and the transporting of merchandise, and a good many articles will probably drop in price again, especially if the ships announced as having sailed from various countries should arrive soon, or before the season of good weather opens. Not only for the reasons already mentioned, the lack of storage space and the high cost of warehousing, but also because there are so few large speculators, I do not think that the business of this place will increase or take on a sustained activity until toward the end of April or the beginning of May. Then the ease of transport and the needs of ten to fifteen thousand whites and fifty thousand Indians will carry off in an instant all that is stored in the warehouses at New Helvetia and at Stockton,<sup>\*</sup> on the San Joaquin. Then the need of provisions and the more or less considerable enterprises of the thousands of people who will be going to the placers will immediately absorb nine-tenths of all the spirits, wines, provisions and almost all the merchandise in the country.

4. Stockton was one of the first products of the gold rush. Originally laid out as Tuleburg by Capt. C. M. Weber on his French Camp rancho in the fall of 1847, the town was little more than a name until the rush began in the summer of '48, when its strategic position on the San Joaquin and the route to the Southern mines made it a natural center of trade. In September, 1848, Capt. Weber returned from the mines and took active charge. He had the town resurveyed, renamed it Stockton for the conquering Commodore, built a store, and by the time of Moerenhout's writing (February, 1849) it was a flourishing tent city and river port, serving as entrepot to the Southern mines, as Sacramento did to the Northern. Bancroft, *op. cit.*, V, 674-75.

According to the reports that came to us in various ways, the emigration from all the neighboring territories to California will be even more extraordinary than the marvelous discoveries that are drawing all these people to this country. The entire populations of the northern provinces of Mexico

seem ready to start. Six or seven thousand inhabitants of Oregon are expected to leave that territory about April and to arrive here in May, for the journey from the Willamette<sup>\*</sup> to the Sacramento is but twenty days. The settlement of the Mormons, five to six thousand persons, near the Great Salt Lake, will set out at about the same time and will cross the Sierra Nevada in June or July. It is impossible to say yet what will be the number of emigrants from the United States by way of the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains, through New Mexico, etc., but there will not be less than 25,000 of them who will enter California in September and October.

5. *Wellenutte* in the copyist's transcription.

All the vessels arriving here from the ports of the west coast of the Americas, from Lower California to Chili, from the islands of the South Seas (*les îles du Grand Océan*)--all are filled with passengers. As I had the honor to say in my preceding dispatches, fifty to sixty thousand immigrants will arrive in this country before the end of autumn or within six to eight months.

I therefore think, Monsieur le Ministre, that some shipments may safely be sent from France, the cargoes being made up according to the note that I had the honor to address to you, but considerably increasing the quantity of spirits and wines, as also that of provisions, arms, ready-made clothing, *objets de luxe* and furniture, but cutting down on the ordinary white and calico stuffs. The English and Americans will flood the country with these, and in view of the limited number of women they will probably fall below the prices for which they would sell in other markets of these seas.

I have had the honor to mention before the difficulties that ships encounter here because of desertion, to which must be added the no less serious one of finding warehouses or other means of disposing of goods. The way to remedy both of these inconveniences more or less would be to allow the crews to go to the Placer for two or three months on their own account, under the supervision of an officer and furnishing them provisions, etc. In this way the ship might serve as a storehouse and there would be time to dispose of the cargo without being subjected to the ruinous charges for unloading, storage, etc., the ship's company could be held together and there would be sailors to take the ship to sea again.

The town of Yerba Buena continues to make great progress. Spacious and fine houses are constantly being erected here, and this despite the enormous price of twelve to fifteen thousand francs per thousand feet for lumber and the wages of forty' to fifty francs per day that the carpenters charge.\* Even the land continuously increases in value. The best situated lots (25 varas by 50) sell for from six to fifteen thousand dollars. Nor is Yerba Buena the only place where buildings are going up, despite these enormous prices. At the Pueblo of San José, where materials and labor are higher still, several fine buildings are under construction, and in a new town\* situated between the Sacramento and New Helvetia, lots 80 feet by 150, that were selling two months ago for one or two hundred, now sell for one or two thousand dollars. But there, just as here and at the Pueblo of San José, there is a shortage of building materials, and it would be a likely speculation to bring in ready made houses of wood or of iron if these could be manufactured at reasonable prices in France; that is to say, such as to compete with the English or the Americans.

6. John Henry Brown and Robert A. Parker were erecting the Parker House at about this time, at first paying carpenters \$8.00 per day, in coin or in gold dust at the rate of \$10.00 per ounce. They could get only one bricklayer at \$20.00 and a helper at \$16.00. Before the building was finished they had to raise the carpenters to \$15.00. But the profits from the little City Hotel were more than sufficient to provide the \$3,000 per week that went into labor on the Parker House. One gambling room alone was bringing Brown a rent of \$200 per day. Brown, John Henry, *Early Days of San Francisco*, S. F., Grabhorn Press, 1933, pp. 82-88.

7. Doubtless Sacramento. The first public sale of lots took place there January 9, 1849. Captain Sutter, already enmeshed in financial difficulties, had conveyed the site to his son, John A. Sutter, Jr., who originally sold the lots through the agency of Peter H. Burnett, who made the start of a large fortune in the business and before the year was out was judge of the Supreme Court and then the first elected Governor of the State of California. Bancroft, *op. cit.* II, 736, VI, 447-48; Burnett, Peter H., *Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer*, N. Y., 1880, pp. 293-94.

This country is perfectly quiet despite the excesses of gambling and drinking. But the American inhabitants are discontented with the present government which leaves them practically without civil authorities, and they are going to have a general convention at the Pueblo of San José\* with the intention of founding courts and establishing a provisional government. . . \*

8. The agitation for a civil government had been growing for two years and in December, 1848, and January, 1849, meetings were held in San José, San Francisco and Sacramento which resulted in the resolve to hold a Constitutional convention if Congress should fail to act in the matter before the close of its session in March. To give the movement a more legal and orderly character, Brigadier General Bennet Riley, the new governor of California, issued a proclamation on June 3, calling a constitutional convention. After considerable

controversy over his right to take this step, delegates were elected August 1, and the convention assembled at Monterey, September 1, 1849. Bancroft, *op. cit.* VI, 261, 269, 284; Burnett, *Recollections*, 294-99; Goodwin, Cardinall, *Establishment of State Government in California*, N. Y., 1914. pp. 72-86; Willey, Samuel H., *The Transition Period of California*, S. F., 1901, pp. 84-86, 89, 92.

9. A passage regarding routine consular business is omitted at this point. Moerenhout tells of assisting some French passengers from Tahiti in getting their goods through the customs.

As ships filled with passengers are constantly arriving from Mexico, from Chili, from Sandwich [Islands], etc., there is a housing shortage and rents <sup>52</sup> have gone up to enormous prices. The simplest room will rent for from two to three hundred francs per month, but still none can be had, and two or three hundred people are living in tents.

Please accept, Monsieur le Ministre, the assurance of my great respect.

The Consul of the French Republic,

J. A. MOERENHOUT.

#### DOCUMENT VIII<sup>\*</sup>

1. Correspondance Consulaire; Box Monterey; Consulat de France à Monterey, No. 21.

#### MOERENHOUT TO MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Monsieur le Ministre: Monterey, March 30, 1849.

By my letter of the 15th of February last, <sup>\*</sup> from Yerba Buena, I had the honor to send you a list of the ships that put in at that port from the first of July to the 31st of December, 1848. Enclosed herewith, Your Excellency will find a list of the ships that visited the port of Monterey during the last half of the same year. <sup>\*</sup>

2. Document VII, *supra*. Ministerial notation: "That letter is not with this one, but accompanies a later letter, of the 25th April, which repeats the observations on Monterey."

3. Not found with this document. See, however, Bancroft, *Hist. of Calif.*, V, 576-81.

From these documents, Your Excellency will be able to see the immense difference that there is now between these two places, both as ports and as commercial centers. Monterey, situated as it

were outside the radius of the principal business activity, is now but a very secondary port. Business here is comparatively of such little importance that foreign merchant ships no longer put in here and goods are received only at second hand and at much higher prices than at Yerba Buena. But the discoveries of gold are daily extending southward and already gold is being taken from the soil washed by the Merced River and by the *Arroyo de las Mariposas* which have their source in the Sierra Nevada between the 36th and 37th degrees North. It is proposed to open a direct road from Monterey to these placers, by which even wagons will be able to go there in four to six days. This will greatly change the state and importance of this town, for it will then become, like the Pueblo of San José, a rendezvous for those who are going and coming from the placers and one of the principal places where they will obtain provisions, merchandise, etc. . . . \*

4. A rather lengthy passage regarding consular affairs is omitted. Moerenhout tells of Étienne Jourdain's refusal to accept the post of consular agent at Yerba Buena, which will make it necessary for Moerenhout to go there himself and spend several months of the year. This leads to the delicate subject of the appointment of a certain M. Langlois as consular agent at San Francisco by Patrice Dillon, then French consul and chargé d'affaires at Honolulu. Langlois, says Moerenhout, is incompetent, and this irregular appointment has caused Moerenhout much embarrassment, by discrediting his own authority. The difficult question of salary is also alluded to. Owing to the extraordinary rise in prices, the Consul says that at least 25,000 francs per year would be required for the most modest livelihood.

At the time of my departure from Yerba Buena, the 12th of this month, the town was more than ever crowded with foreigners, who are daily arriving on vessels from all parts of the Pacific and are unable to find lodging. The steamship *California* arrived at Yerba Buena on the first of March with three to four hundred passengers, but, as she was unable to put back to sea immediately, for lack of coal, all the members of her crew deserted. Even the engineers abandoned their posts to go to the placers.

All vessels entering the port of Yerba Buena find themselves in the same situation. Captain Pignon Blanc, of the *Stanlili* [?] of Bordeaux, had just arrived from Valparaiso with passengers and freight, but it was impossible for him to go to sea again, for his crew remained aboard only on condition of being allowed to go for several months to the placers. As he had made an excellent voyage, this captain was thinking of selling his ship and going to the placers himself with some of the sailors.

All the reports from the gold regions confirm the fact that these deposits, even the ones that were exploited continuously during 1848, have not diminished at all in their richness. It also seems that these discoveries are constantly extending both to the north and to the south. The immigrants coming from Oregon found gold from their first arrival in the Sacramento Valley, and according to all reports, it seems certain that the gold-bearing lands extend from the Oregon border, or 42° N., to San Francisco [San Francisquito] in 34°20' of the same (N.) latitude. In order to make more plain to you the nature and the extent of these gold regions and the location of the richest diggings, I will try to give a short description of the country where they are situated and which I have been over in part myself.

Upper California extends from 40 to 60 leagues inland from the sea, and is traversed over its whole length by three parallel mountain ranges. The most easterly is sometimes called by the Spanish name of *Sierra Nevada*, Mountain or Range of Snow, and sometimes by the English names of “Californian Range,” or “Californian Mountains,” and is from six to ten thousand feet high. The second, known as the Central Range, has an average elevation of from fifteen hundred to two thousand feet. The third in some localities rises directly from the seashore but is generally distant one to six leagues from it. It is known by the old inhabitants of the country under the names of different places, such as *Sierra de San Rafaél*, *San Bruno*, *Santa Cruz*, *Santa Lucía*, etc., and under the name of Coast Range, *Chaine du littoral*, by the Americans and other foreigners. This range also averages from 1,500 to 2,500 feet in height.

The first of these ranges is simply a continuation of the Cascade Range of Oregon, and in addition to its great elevation it is of very considerable width, and from its northern extremity to 340 cuts off all communication to the east. There, however, at the 34th degree it gradually slopes down and is broken here and there and continues thus in broken echelon formation to the southernmost extremity of California.

At 42°, or the northern border of Upper California, and also at 34°30', near the southern border of the same country, lesser chains branch off from this range to the west, toward the sea, and join or interlace with the central chain in such a way as to break all communication from north to south and

to form a basin 160 leagues in extent from north to south and 25 to 40 leagues from east to west. This basin has no outlet but the Strait of Carquinez in San Francisco Bay. Through this strait the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers flow out, the one, after a course of 100 leagues from the north, the other after a course of from 40 to 50 leagues from the south; 54 having received between them all the waters from the western side of the Sierra Nevada and from the eastern side of the Central Range.

It will perhaps not be irrelevant to mention here that a singular tradition exists among the Indians with regard to this basin. They contend that at a time removed only a few generations from the present the Tulare and Sacramento valleys were but one immense lake without any outlet whatever to the sea. During a severe upheaval of the land, they say, there opened in the Central Range the passage known today as the Strait of Carquinez and in the Coast Range that which forms the entrance to San Francisco Bay and that then the waters, bursting through these two Openings to the sea, left dry this immense plain that reaches from the northern to the southern extremities of the country.

It would be astonishing, no doubt, that such a happening should date from such a recent time as to have remained in the memory of such a people as the aborigines of Upper California. There are nevertheless some facts in support of this tradition that seem to indicate that these lands are new and that the vegetation or trees that they bear all originated at about the same time and are but a few centuries old. As I pointed out in the report of my visit to the placers, the largest oaks seem all of about the same age and full of health and vigor, and appear not yet to have reached the stage at which their extremities commence to wither or when the trunk of the tree itself dries out and falls into decay.

On the eastern side, all this immense plain or basin is bordered by a chain of hills which commences at its northern end at 42° and extends to its southern end, about 40°30' [34°30']. These are the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, of an average elevation of from 100 to 600 feet over a width of from 2 to 5 leagues.

It would be hard to say whether these hills themselves were formerly under the waters of the lake or whether they formed its eastern shore, whether they sank and spread out from the main range by the effect of the mass of water when it burst out toward the sea, or whether they were formed and have always been where they now are. But there is one significant fact that would support the belief that they were formed under the water or were detached from the main range by the effect of the water. This is that they are not found beyond the lesser chains that form the northern and southern extremities of the great basin. Similarly, gold seems not to exist outside the borders of this sort of terrain. I must add also that it is the same in the east-west direction, for as soon as one passes this line of hills to the east and enters into the first slopes of an unbroken chain of larger and higher mountains, one no longer finds gold, neither in the ravines nor in the river beds, while below or to the west of this same line of hills the soil contains no gold either, and that carried by the rivers diminishes in quantity and size in proportion as the water courses flow away to the west across the plains. This diminution is so regular in all the water courses that flow down the Sierra Nevada across this chain of hills and into the Sacramento or San Joaquin that one might calculate from the size of the gold almost exactly to what distance it had been carried and how far it was from the original deposits or “dry diggings” as they are called by the Americans.

It therefore appears certain that the gold found in such great quantity in the little gulches between the hills does come from these same hills. It is beyond doubt that these are and always have been the true repositories of the gold that is now being found there. It is equally probable that gold exists there in veins that will soon be the object of more profitable mining operations. Such, at least, seems to be indicated by the large rocks of five to twenty pounds--rocky masses mixed with quartz--that the miners are beginning to find in the very hillsides and that carry veins of gold, some of them more than an inch thick. Your Excellency will find herewith a piece of one of these rocks which weighed seven pounds but the vein of gold in which is smaller. As to the formation of these hills, the base seems to be quartz, which appears there in all forms, in masses or in veins, surrounded by beds of stone, of sand, of clay, etc.

It is therefore probable, Monsieur le Ministre, that these placers are not simply small transitory deposits of gold-bearing earth like those of Mexico, Peru, and elsewhere, but that they are the original repositories where the virgin gold appears in extraordinarily heavy veins and that some day they will, as I have said above, be the object of the most profitable mining. But entirely apart from this question, which may still seem doubtful, Your Excellency will be able to form some idea of the extent and importance of these placers from the descriptions that I have just given; for what is certain is that there is gold in all the gulches between the many hills from one end to the other of this basin, that is to say, over 160 leagues in length by 2 to 5 leagues in width. When one thinks that besides these principal repositories, the thousands of streams, all the watercourses and rivers that flow down from the Sierra Nevada and cross this gold-bearing zone, carry with them such quantities that hundreds and thousands of workmen could not exhaust them in centuries, one cannot but wonder what importance this country must soon acquire and what effects and what changes these discoveries will cause in these seas.

When I passed through the Pueblo of San José I found it deserted. Likewise at Monterey nearly all the men have left for the placers, and if there are a few left it is only because they have not the necessary horses either to transport themselves or their provisions. A horse today costs from \$ 150 to \$400, an ox from \$50 to \$100; and as few of those arriving here have the means to pay such prices, the theft of these animals is now so common that it is impossible to keep them without watching them night and day.

Everybody having gone to the placers, nothing is selling, and as vessels continue to arrive at San Francisco a drop in the prices of all merchandise is expected. What is more serious, the means of transportation to the placers are so small in proportion to the proximate requirements that the miners will soon be in danger of dire need, even for provisions. From 200 to 400 francs per hundred pounds is now being paid for transportation from the Sacramento and San Joaquin landings to the placers.

Pray accept, Monsieur le Ministre, the assurance of my respect and devotion.

The Consul of France,

J. A. MOERENHOUT.

DOCUMENT IX<sup>\*</sup>

1. Correspondance Consulaire; Box Monterey; Consulat de France a Monterey, No. 22.

MOERENHOUT TO MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Monsieur le Ministre:Monterey, April 25, 1849.

...<sup>\*</sup> The gold regions are difficult of access from Monterey, for lack of roads, and this port, off the track of immigration, is forlorn, deserted and without business for the present. The solitude and quiet of this place are truly remarkable in the midst of the general commotion. The route followed by those who enter California from the south and want to go to the gold region is by way of San Fernando, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and the *plaine de Monterey ou de la Nation* [Salinas Valley]. Thus for more than a month two or three hundred people have been passing daily five or six hours from the port, but they are hastening to reach the gold country and few come here, as the detour would make them lose one or two days at least.

2. A short passage is omitted, regarding list of vessels and repeating remarks as to contrast between Monterey and Yerba Buena.

It is probable, however, that the extension of the placers toward the south and the great number of immigrants entering California by all routes will soon produce some changes for the better in the state of things at Monterey. For according to the latest reports gold is found in the Tuolumne, Merced and Mariposa rivers,<sup>\*</sup> which are situated nearly east of this port and but forty to fifty leagues away. Therefore despite the lack of a wagon road, which it is impossible to open now, it is probable that a large number of miners, finding no place to lodge in the more northerly settlements, will endeavor to come to Monterey, as they may do on horseback in four or five days even from the Stanislaus placers, as soon as the San Joaquin River is fordable, that is to say, by August or September. It is certain, furthermore, that when the inhabitants of the port and the environs who

have gone to the placers return, in two or three months, they will give business a new start and put large values in circulation... \*

3. In the copyist's transcription: *Tualami, la Marced and de las Mariposas*.

4. An omitted passage reports the death of Cesareo Lataillade, "français de nation" and Spanish vice-consul, by the accidental discharge of a rifle at Santa Barbara. Lataillade came to California as supercargo of the *Trinidad* in 1842, and became a well-known business man of Santa Barbara. He was appointed vice-consul of Spain in 1846, and in 1848 Consul of France at Monterey, evidently to succeed Moerenhout, but his death intervened. See Rush to Secretary of State, No. 77, Paris, March 5, 1848, State Dept. Archives, Wash., MSS Despatches: France, Vol. 31; Poussin to Buchanan, Washington, Dec. 26, 1848; *ibid.*, MSS Notes from: France Vol. 13; Buchanan to Poussin, J. B. Moore (ed.), *The Works of James Buchanan*, VIII, 271 *et seq.* Moerenhout reports that he is writing for the archives of the Spanish vice-consulate "to keep here under seal;" also that he is informing the Spanish Minister to Mexico.

As I am still without instructions from Your Excellency, and as there is no business now in Monterey, I will in a few days go again to Yerba Buena, where a multitude of Frenchmen are arriving daily from all ports of the western part of the Americas. They, as well as the captains of French vessels, may have need of my counsel and protection. But with reference to this journey 57 I must once more take the liberty of observing to Your Excellency that in this last mentioned port my expenses far exceed my salary. I trust, therefore, that the Government of the Republic will soon give consideration to my difficult position in this country.

Four American transports have arrived here and at Yerba Buena within the past few days with the Generals Smith and Riley\* and four companies of soldiers of the regular army of the United States. General Smith, military commander of the two territories, Oregon and Upper California, has taken up his residence at San Francisco. General Riley, Governor of Upper California, will, it seems, establish his headquarters at Monterey.

Most respectfully, etc. The Consul of France,

J. A. MOERENHOUT.

5. General Persifor F. Smith, who succeeded Colonel Mason as commander of the military division of California, arrived on the mail steamer *California*, Feb. 26. 1849. Brevet Brigadier General Bennet Riley, Lt. Col., arrived with his brigade at Monterey, April 12, on the transport ship *Iowa*, and assumed office next day as Governor of California. The transport ship *Rome* had arrived a few days before with two companies of infantry under Major

Heintzelman. For correspondence of Riley and Smith see *31st Cong., 1st Sess., House Ex. Doc. No. 17, Serial 573* and *idem, Sen. Doc. No. 52, Serial 561, pp. 85 et seq.*; *idem, Sen. Doc. No. 1, Serial 549, pp. 156-78.*

## DOCUMENT X<sup>\*</sup>

1. Correspondance Consulaire; Box Monterey; Consulat de France à Monterey, No. 23.

Monsieur le Ministre: <sup>\*</sup> Monterey, May 15, 1849.

2. An omitted passage repeats the news of Lataillade's death (see Note 4 to Doc. IX, *supra*) and also reports the death of Olivier de Leyssègues, at Monterey, May 10, 1849. The latter had a small part in the Stockton-Frémont-Gasquet-Panaud incident of 1846. Calif. Hist. Soc. *Quarterly*, Vol. XII, pp. 44,46.

The emigration from all parts of the Americas to this place is still increasing day by day. Over ten thousand people from Sonora and Lower California, men, women and children, have passed within a few leagues of Monterey during the last two months, and more keep coming. Most of the emigrants from those countries who come by land travel on burros (*mulets*) and bring more or less of provisions with them, but many others make this long and wearisome journey on foot and are so poor and so destitute that they have to beg along the way for their food. Among those who come on the ships there are also many who arrive here without the slightest resources, having in many cases sold all they had to pay their passage. All of these people find themselves in great difficulty when they get here. When they arrive in the ports they are still far from the gold regions. As to go there they must either embark for the Sacramento or the San Joaquin or travel across wild and uninhabited country, they generally suffer much fatigue and deprivation before they reach the placers, and even there, unless they are extraordinarily successful, their work hardly suffices more than to keep them in food.

The difficulties of going from the ports to the placers are constantly increasing, for the animals and means of transportation are becoming so costly and so scarce that it will soon become impossible to obtain them. A crude wagon and two pair of oxen, that formerly could be had for fifty or sixty dollars, now cost from four to six hundred dollars. Despite the large number of burros recently brought in from all the northern provinces of Mexico, horses sell for from 150 to 300 dollars, and the carriage of goods into the interior is from twenty-five to fifty dollars for each twenty leagues. Thus it is that people arriving here without any knowledge of the country, or the least idea of

the difficulties that they must encounter to reach the gold region, are obliged to sell all that they have brought, even their provisions, 58 often at mean prices, in order to obtain what they need to undertake this difficult journey.

The difficulties of the overland journey to the gold regions, especially in the winter months and from the 1st of May to the 1st of September, or during the overflow of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers, and the enormous expenditures that these journeys now entail, are all in favor of the Bay of San Francisco and increase its importance. In all seasons, boats, schooners and other vessels of five to seven feet draft can go from all the ports of this bay to New Helvetia on the Sacramento and to Stockton, five leagues from the mouth of the San Joaquin, and can go much farther between the 15th of May and the 15th of August when the rivers are high. But here I must observe that the immigrants who take this way to the gold regions are also exposed to great difficulties and expenses. For there, at New Helvetia and at Stockton, it is impossible to secure horses, oxen or wagons at any price and the cost of transportation from there even to the nearest diggings is from fifty to sixty dollars per hundredweight. The price is so exorbitant that most of the travelers have to sell or abandon their baggage and frequently even their provisions and to go on to the placers on foot, taking only the strictest necessities or what they can carry on their backs. Even at the placers the result is uncertain, although generally those who are able and willing to work can make an ounce of gold a day at least and those who are fortunate enough to be able to go there with sufficient provisions for a stay of three to five months are certain to make for themselves a small fortune of one thousand to five thousand dollars.

I have gone into these details so that Your Excellency may, if you judge proper, bring them to the knowledge of such Frenchmen as may be tempted by the immense riches of these placers and may wish to come to this country. The best times to come are in March and April and after the 15th of August, that is to say, before and after the floods.

According to the latest news from San Francisco, the merchant ships are continuing to arrive in such numbers that a commercial crisis appears inevitable.\* Although the prices of some articles have held up, the quantity of merchandise imported is so far in excess of the needs of the

---

The inside story of the gold rush, by Jacques Antoine Moerenhout ... translated and edited from documents in the French archives by Abraham P. Nasatir, in collaboration with George Ezra Dane who wrote the introduction and conclusion <http://www.loc.gov/resource/calbk.018>

population, that notwithstanding the resources of the country and the means and disposition to spend of those who live or come here, the country will be so flooded with goods that most articles will drop, and probably even below the cost prices of the countries from which they have been shipped. The fact is that the shipments from all parts of the globe exceed all estimates and all expectations. To this I will add what I have had the honor to point out in my earlier dispatches, that in this country there are no government stores or warehouses, that the private warehouses of the business men are insufficient, that the costs of unloading and storage are from 10 to 20 per cent. per month for bulky articles, that customs duties are high and payable in cash, that commissions 59 are high and interest on money from two to five per cent. per month, and that if a cargo cannot be sold on board and is stored, it will be eaten up within three or four months by the enormous charges and expenses of all kinds.

3. Lévy, who drew largely on this consular correspondence, stated that from April, 1849, to the end of that year, 549 vessels entered San Francisco Bay, 233 of them American and 316 foreign. Lévy, Daniel, *Les Français en Californie* (San Francisco, 1884), p. 19. For other statistics see Hittell, J. S., *History of San Francisco* (S. F., 1878), p. 139 *et seq.*; King, Edward A., "Boats arriving in San Francisco Bay from March 26, 1849 to December 30, 1849," *Quarterly of the Society of California Pioneers*, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 36-45.

There are now ninety ships at Yerba Buena, almost all without crews, for the desertion of sailors is general. Wages have gone up as high as two hundred dollars per month. According to the letters I have just received from Yerba Buena, the difficulties that the captains of the French ships are experiencing in this respect particularly require my presence in that port.

With greatest respect, etc.

The Consul of the French Republic at Monterey,

J. A. MOERENHOUT,

DOCUMENT XI<sup>\*</sup>

1. Correspondance Politique, Monterey; Correspondance de M. Moerenhout, no number. Ministerial notation: Copy sent to Ministry of Commerce, Oct. 30, 1849. Urgent.

MOERENHOUT TO MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Yerba Buena, San Francisco Bay,

Monsieur le Ministre: June 16, 1849.

In my dispatch of May 15, No. 23, I had the honor to inform you that I was again going to San Francisco, the only place where any French business men are established and where the French ships come. Detained, however, by the examination of the papers of M. Delessègues, deceased at Monterey the 10th of May last, as I had the honor to report to Your Excellency, \* did not arrive here until the 12th of this month.

2. See footnote 2 to Document X, *supra*.

I will not stop to describe again to you this strange place which has grown by at least a hundred and fifty houses in the last three months, where 3,000 people are still living in tents and where entire cargoes are lying exposed on the shore, in yards, enclosures, or even in the middle of the streets. What I do wish to speak of to Your Excellency is the present state of the market here and the probable results of all the shipments that will be sent to this country during the next six or eight months. In several of my letters I had the honor to call to Your Excellency's attention how small the population of this country still is, despite a constant emigration from almost all countries of the world. Counting even the sailors and those who have only come here to work a few months in the mines and then return to their homelands, the number of the inhabitants does not exceed forty thousand. To this number must be added thirty to fifty thousand Indians. This small population which, it is true, will double before the end of the year, has had great needs and has occasioned a volume of sales that has been the more extraordinary since the people have had large values at their disposal and have been able to obtain all their necessities and in many cases luxuries regardless of cost, for as I believe I have also pointed out to Your Excellency, both nationalities, American and Mexican, seem equally prodigal in this country, and disposed to spend extravagantly. So long as the gold of the placers lasts these dispositions will not change, and the needs of those now here and of those who continue to come will increase daily as they build dwellings and settle down. It is certain that each family, each person even, that makes any sort of an establishment here, will

generally spend several thousand dollars in a few days, for, destitute of belongings, they must buy everything, and as I have said above, procure all that they need whatever it may cost.

These extraordinary needs and the ease of satisfying them held prices up for a long time, despite the numerous arrivals of vessels and the great quantity of merchandise imported. But the number of ships kept increasing every day, cargo after cargo was piled up, and hundreds of other vessels being announced to arrive from all parts of the world, it was impossible for prices to hold up, particularly now that two-thirds of the population is at the placers and the amount of cash, gold dust and bullion here has diminished considerably.

The other causes for the general drop in all commodities are those that I have mentioned in my earlier dispatches, that is to say, the lack of government bonded warehouses or stores where goods might be deposited, the enormous duties that must be paid in cash, the charges of private storehouses, that eat up the value of a cargo in a few months. There must also be added the fear of fire which has in a way held up speculations, for all the new buildings are of wood and very close together in a place where there are seven to eight months of dry weather and the constant menace of a furious northwest wind, and frightful destruction of property is momentarily expected.

In this state of affairs and with the alarming news that from two to three hundred merchant vessels are en route for this country from the United States it is to be desired that no shipments be sent here for a long time. The fall in prices will be so general that there will be danger even for those who come here with the best assorted cargoes. To avoid the great and almost certain losses to business men who might be sending consignments here or whose ships may already be on the way, I am going to write to the consulates general in Peru and Chili and to the Admiral, Commander in Chief of the naval station in these seas, for the purpose of preventing shipments from those countries and to warn the captains to dispose of their cargoes in the [way] ports where they put in.

The only articles still in favor are: lumber, which continues to sell at from 250 to 300 dollars per thousand feet; arms, plain and fancy pistols may be sold to advantage; but these are the only articles that offer any assurance of profit. Despite the large consumption of our brandies and our wines

which, like other articles of general use and of prime necessity, will perhaps run short within six months, the present lack of storage space and the enormous charges discourage all purchases on speculation and have caused these articles to fall to prices that would yield no profit even if they were brought directly from France.

61

Another cause of the languor that has become noticeable in the business of this country for the first time since the discovery of the placers is found in the land speculations that are now being carried to an extreme approaching madness. Land values all over the country have increased a thousand per cent. At Yerba Buena lots somewhat near to the shore or toward the center of the town bring from four to ten dollars the square foot. At Benicia on Carquinez Strait lots sell for three thousand dollars, and it is the same with all the new settlements that are now being formed on the Sacramento and the San Joaquin under the names of Sacramento City, Sutterville, \* New York \* and Stockton. Farms that sold for two to five thousand dollars some twelve or twenty months ago, are now worth from thirty to a hundred thousand, and nothing gives a better idea of the values already in circulation and in the hands of individuals of all classes than these speculations and the enormous sums that are paid every day for land in all parts of the country.. \*

3. Sutterville, Captain Sutter's pet project, was laid out early in 1846, on the east side of the Sacramento some three miles below Sutter's Fort. Sacramento, which really was not started until January, 1849, was better situated at the confluence of the Sacramento and the American, and soon outstripped Sutterville despite the efforts of the latter's promoters, prominent among whom were G. McDougall & Co. Bancroft, *Hist. of Calif*, VI, 15, 447-50.

4. New York of the Pacific was the hope of Colonel J. D. Stevenson and Dr. W. C. Parker of the regiment of New York Volunteers. These men of vision bought the 10,000-acre Los Medanos rancho so that their metropolis of the West should have room to expand from its beginnings at the junction of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers with San Francisco (Suisun) Bay. It grew steadily until it consisted of three buildings and a landing barge, where sailing vessels sometimes called. At this point it announced its candidacy for State capital, but received not one vote. Thereafter it rapidly declined and died from the combined effect of disappointment and the neglect which came with the advent of fast river steamers that found no occasion to stop there. In the present century it has been resurrected, however, and under the somewhat more modest name of Pittsburg has become a thriving little industrial city. Wiltsee, E. A., "The City of New York of the Pacific," *Quarterly of Calif. Hist. Soc.*, Vol. XII, No. 1, pp. 25-34.

5. An omitted passage lists the French vessels that have put in at San Francisco during the preceding three months, as follows: the *Stanely*, Capt. Pimo Blanc (just sailed for Chile); the *Therèse*, Capt. Pepin; the *Chateau Briant*, Capt. Eymont; the *Victorine*, Capt. Du Bony; the *Rolant*, Capt. Bajoux; the *Olympe*, Capt. Dansas.

With the greatest respect, etc.

The consul of the French Republic at Monterey,

J. A. MOERENHOUT.

DOCUMENT XII \*

1. Correspondance Consulaire; Box Monterey; Correspondence of Moerenhout; No. 25. Extracts taken for Ministries of Commerce and Marine, Oct. 4, 1849.

MOERENHOUT TO MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Yerba Buena, San Francisco Bay

Monsieur le Ministre: June 30th, 1849.

... \* In my last dispatch I reported the commercial crisis threatening this country, and indicated the causes that are bringing it about. .. All these causes do exist, and will contribute to depress the prices of imported goods and to occasion ruinous results to those arriving here with cargoes before next December or January. Since my arrival here I have carefully studied conditions in this port which is the principal and almost the only commercial center of the country, from which come all supplies for the placers, for the settlements within sixty leagues roundabout, and even for the whole country, as this port alone receives the vessels that have come directly from the United States or from foreign countries. Having, as I say, carefully examined conditions here, I am convinced that the principal and almost the sole cause of the drop in prices of merchandise and of the commercial crisis threatening this country, is the lack of government bonded warehouses, to which must be added the other causes that are really consequences of this one, such as the immediate outlay of duties and the enormous cost of storage in private warehouses.

2. Omitted passages repeat previous observations as to commercial difficulties at San Francisco.

Undoubtedly the consignments of merchandise and the many shipments that are being made to this country from all parts of the world are excessive. In fact there is no longer the least proportion

between these truly prodigious shipments and the needs of this country, but nevertheless its needs are such 62 that it is difficult to appreciate their full extent and they make one suspect that if it were not that the causes mentioned hinder and paralyze speculative sales, dampen the spirit of enterprise and frighten the rich business men, perhaps the prices of most articles would hold up sufficiently not to cause loss, while many others would find a ready market and would afford some profit to those who might bring them directly from the countries where they are produced. Among these articles would be our wines and spirits, which are consumed in considerable quantities and the demand for which will continue to increase in this country where large values are in the hands of all classes, one of whose principal diversions is to indulge in excessive drinking, even at meetings and festivals. Next comes luxury, the demand for which is being felt the more since the inhabitants of the country and the foreigners as well had been living poorly and within a very short time and without the least trouble became the possessors of immense riches, some by the values that their lands had acquired, others by speculations that yielded them enormous profits. Thus families that did not possess a thousand dollars in 1847, now enjoy fortunes of a hundred to three or four hundred thousand dollars. So also there is no such thing as a poor man in this country; for the lowest type of laborer can earn from five to eight dollars a day, an artisan from ten to twenty dollars, and even servants earn from seventy-five to two hundred dollars a month. In such a country, having no public amusements, man is prodigal and spendthrift. He generally loves ostentation and affects extravagant luxury--luxury that will be carried the further in that each seeks to outshine the other, and has gold enough to satisfy even his whims and fancies.

It is probable, therefore, Monsieur le Ministre, that articles of fashion and all our *objets de luxe* will continue to sell well, and these articles will certainly be among those in Considerable demand and the prices of which will hold up. Accordingly I hope that the French vessels that come here with well-assorted cargoes of good articles only, may make voyages which, if not very profitable, at least will not be so bad as those from other countries. Brandy still holds up--the last sold brought twelve and thirteen dollars per case on public sale. Our wines, though not in great demand, are being consumed and are beginning to run short. Our articles of fashion, silks, gauze, tulle, our muslins and other fine stuffs are dear and very scarce. It is the same with furniture and all *objets de luxe* for

house decoration. None of these things is yet either oversupplied or unsalable. On the contrary, most of them are in demand and sought after, and sell for high prices.

The emigration continues from all parts of the world and all the ships, from whatever country they may come, are filled with passengers. Some of those who are coming overland from the United States have already entered the country by the southern route, and thirty to forty thousand who are on the way will arrive before the end of September. There is not the slightest doubt that this country will have a population of from 130,000 to 150,000 63

THE PRINCIPAL STREET OF SAN FRANCISCO. From William Redmond Ryan's *Personal Adventures in Upper and Lower California in 1849-9*, London, 1850.

souls at least, before the end of 1849.\* It is becoming a truly serious question to know where this multitude will find lodging, for the houses that are being built are not at all in proportion to the number of people already in the country and of the immigrants who are constantly arriving. Then, too, lumber, bricks, and all building materials sell for the most enormous prices and will for a long time be the articles that will yield the greatest profits. The same may be said of ready-made houses either of wood or of iron, and it is desirable that some of these should be brought by the ships coming from France.

3. Moerenhout's estimate is rather high, unless Indians be included. Bancroft says. "barely 100,000 at the close of 1849" (*Hist. of Calif.*, VII, 698). John S. Hittell (*History of the City of San Francisco*, 1878, p. 140) also estimates the population at the end of 1849 as 100,000, including 35,000 who had come by sea as passengers, 3,000 sailors who had deserted their ships and 42,000 persons who had come overland, during that year. The National census of 1850 gave a partial count of 92,597, and a semi-official estimate of 117,538. The State census of 1852 showed a population of 264,435. *State Register for 1857*, S. F. and Sacramento, 1857, p. 114.

Regular travel to the placers began late this year. The heavy falls of rain and snow during the winter prevented or hindered the work of washing the gold-bearing soil. In some places these soils were so wet that holes dug in them immediately filled with water. These difficulties discouraged many foreigners, especially those who had expected to find gold in lumps and to pick it up without trouble or work. However, the news received for the past few weeks has been much more encouraging. The waters of the rivers have already lowered considerably and the work of washing has been resumed everywhere, and again gives promise of an extraordinary production of gold.

The new placers near the sources of the Tuolumne and Merced rivers are extremely rich and if the reports are to be believed, the average daily yield per man there is from one to four ounces. Very rich deposits are found in these rivers themselves as the waters lower. More than 12,000 people are working there and it is probable that most of the new arrivals will try to go there, as the place now most renowned for rich production.

Better news also comes from the placers more to the north, from the Stanislaus to the Feather River, fifty to sixty leagues away. Since the rivers have begun to lower and the washing operations have become easier everywhere, it is no exaggeration to place the amount of gold extracted each day at 25,000 to 30,000 ounces.

With such elements of wealth, with a new population that lacks everything, that must receive from abroad all it needs to maintain, lodge and establish itself, it is difficult to predict what fluctuations may occur in the prices of food and of merchandise. Nor can one tell when, despite the appearance of oversupply and abundance of merchandise, a shortage may develop, and prices rise from the depths to the heights.

In several of my dispatches I have mentioned the desertion of crews and the difficulties that shipmasters encounter in the ports of Upper California. Instead of diminishing, these difficulties are constantly increasing, and the captains' position is becoming truly critical and troublesome. Hardly has a ship dropped anchor in San Francisco Bay than the sailors, excited by the spirit of the country and the bad example of their predecessors, are in a state of open mutiny. They will obey no orders, and force the captain to allow them a pay of five or six dollars per day if he would not have them leave the ship. This situation is the worse in that there is here no authority, no police, no military force to assist or uphold the captains, and in that it is impossible to get another crew together without paying wages of from \$100 to \$200 per month. I would accordingly again advise the masters of French ships, if they must come here, to try to make arrangements with their crews so as to permit them to go to the placers under the supervision of an officer after the ship has been unloaded, and to come aboard again after two or three months. This would make it possible,

if necessary, to keep the cargo on board and to discharge it only as sold, and would afford some assurance of being able to make the return voyage.

These difficulties that shipmasters experience, and from which the shippers suffer so severely, have just occasioned a deplorable incident on the *Rolland*. There also several men of the crew mutinied and attempted to leave the ship, even before the cargo had been set on shore. They went so far in the way of assault that Captain Bajoux, provoked by the most culpable acts of insubordination and violence, found it necessary to use a firearm in self defense, and killed one Behan. I have the honor to send you herewith a copy of the master's protest and the other papers that were sent to Monterey. By the time I reached here all the crew had left the ship and it was impossible for me to conduct an inquest.

I cannot end this letter without again putting before you my situation in this country, where my expenses far exceed my salary from the Government. At the present time, simply for a little room and for board, without a servant, I must spend \$250 a month, and if I establish my residence in this port, where I am absolutely necessary to avoid great difficulties for shipmasters and to protect the Frenchmen living here, my expenses, even to live in a modest and retired manner, will come at least to \$4,500 or \$5,000.

Most respectfully, etc.,

The Consul of the French Republic at Monterey,

J. A. MOERENHOUT.

#### DOCUMENT XIII\*

1. Correspondance Consulaire; Box filonterey; Moerenhout correspondence; No. 26. Copies and extracts were sent to various ministries, Dec. 7, 1849.

#### MOERENHOUT TO MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Monsieur le Ministre:Monterey, September 1, 1849.

The last dispatch that I had the honor to send you from the Port of Yerba Buena, San Francisco Bay, was dated June 30, 1849. Since then I have visited the new settlements, Sacramento City and Sutterville on the Sacramento River and the port of Stockton on the San Joaquin. After crossing the latter river, and finding myself near the placers of the Stanislaus, the Mokelumne, the Calaveras, the Cosumnes, and Dry Creek,\* I thought it advisable to visit them, so that I might tell you how important these new discoveries are and what influence they may have on the commerce and progress of this country.

2. In the copyist's transcription, *Placers du Moquelimos, de las Calaberas, du Cosmoitos & de l'Arroyo Seco*. The fantastic variations in Moerenhout's versions of the names of the various rivers have been disregarded in the translation as without historical significance, for they appear in their present settled forms in "General Riley's Report of a Reconnoissance of a Portion of the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys," dated Sept. 20, 1849, *31st Cong., 1st Sess., House Ex. Doc. No. 17, 1850*, pp. 941-43. reprinted in *California Historical Society Quarterly*, XI, pp. 102-5.

65

Sacramento City\* and its port are at the same spot where the New Helvetia landing used to be, that is to say, in the angle between the Sacramento River and its tributary, the American River.

3. *La ville du Sacrement*. "Sacramento City," like many other California boom towns, started life with a pretentious name, but unlike most of its rivals, lived to justify its pretensions. For the circumstances of its founding see Note 7 to Document VII, *supra*.

The location of the new settlement was very well chosen, for that is as far up the river as vessels of seven or eight feet draft can go the year round. There also the river banks are sheer, high and level with the plain, so that they form natural quays where vessels of all sizes may moor and discharge their cargoes over plank gangways. The thirty-eight ships [then at Sacramento] were anchored or moored so close to shore that their masts and yards were hidden among the branches of the magnificent trees that line the banks of the river there.

During this last visit I also found that a mistaken view had prevailed as to the depth of the river. On the first of August a ship that drew ten to eleven feet of water entered the port under full sail, and as I have said, some much larger ships were still lying afloat along the river banks, the full length of the town. The water was still lowering, however, and from the middle of August to the middle of

December ships of more than eight feet draft probably will not be able to tack in the river so as to go up as far as Sacramento City.

The growth and importance that this new settlement has exhibited are among the marvelous things that are happening in this country. Last year I was at this same place at the same season and there was not a house or even a tent there. Only a few little schooners lay in the port and the only business of any importance was a trade of barter carried on at the fort of New Helvetia. Now there is a town of 3,000 to 4,000 inhabitants there, with a quay lined with fine buildings, with streets laid out and with a large volume of business that increases as communication with the placers and the interior becomes more regular and easy, and where, as I have said, thirty-eight ships were at anchor, the smallest of which was of fifty to sixty tons.

Sutterville<sup>\*</sup> is situated a league to the south-southwest from Sacramento City, and enjoys the same advantages as the latter so far as concerns the depth of water and the natural quays where ships of all sizes may moor and discharge their cargoes over wooden gangways. But it is surrounded by a swamp that prevents communication with the interior during a part of the year and has not been so successful as its rival. When I passed through on August 2, it had only a score of buildings, forty to fifty tents and 400 to 500 inhabitants. Only six vessels, of from fifty to two hundred tons, were anchored in the port.

4. Regarding the rise and decline of Sutterville, see Note 3 to Document XI. The respective locations of Sacramento, Sutterville and Sutter's Fort are well shown on the topographical maps of Lieutenant Derby, reproduced in *California Historical Society Quarterly*, XI, facing pp. 99, 102. The second of these, entitled, "Sketch of General Riley's Route through the Mining Districts, July and Aug. 1849," likewise shows most of the mining camps mentioned by Moerenhout, as they existed at the time of the journey described in this letter.

The only inconveniences of these settlements (but they are serious ones) are the lack of practicable roads to the interior during the winter, exposure to heavy floods during the high water that prevails in May, June and July, and an unhealthful condition from July to October. But these disadvantages will be largely done away with in time, and seem not to hinder the progress of the towns. Their growth is in fact so extraordinary that the two settlements<sup>65</sup> will soon join so as to form a single large city the limits of which will be: the American River on the north and the end of Sutterville on

the south, a distance from north to south of five to six miles, and from the Sacramento River on the west to New Helvetia on the east, a distance of three to four miles from west to east.

Sutter's Fort or New Helvetia has lost all its importance since the founding of the settlements on the Sacramento River. In the fort itself there are still a hotel and a few stores, but its business is languishing and there is no longer any such stir and activity as prevailed there at the time of my visit in 1848.\*

5. See Document III, *supra*, especially pp. 31-33.

The town of Stockton\* is situated on the San Joaquin River about eight leagues in a straight line from its mouth and eleven to twelve leagues sailing from there, following the windings of the river. The area destined for the formation of this town is divided by three deep creeks, 600 to 800 meters apart and running back from the river into the midst of the houses. The middle creek has a channel of easy entrance, is the only one used by the ships, and forms what is now called the Port of Stockton. This creek, as well as the river up to this point, has twelve to fourteen feet of water from the first of May to the middle of July, six to seven feet from the middle of August to the middle of December and seven to nine feet from the first of January to the middle of April. The San Joaquin, you see, has no tributary streams on the west and therefore is not affected by the winter rains, but as it receives from the east the waters of the [snow fed] rivers, Merced, Tuolumne, Stanislaus and several other streams that have their sources in the Sierra Nevada, it rises in an extraordinary way from May to the end of June.

6. The founding and early development of Stockton are sketched in Note 4 to Document VII, *supra*.

Another thing that especially aids navigation on this river is the fact that it is under the influence of the San Francisco Bay tides, which force its waters back even beyond the Port of Stockton and cause it to rise regularly at least two or three feet.

The place where this settlement was started is in a low, bare plain, about three miles from the river, from which it is separated by swamps, sloughs and fields of reeds [tules]. This location is thus in no way comparable to that of Sacramento City in point of beauty or of safety, and will require

difficult and costly work to guard against floods. Its situation is favorable however, at the head of navigation and near the placers of the Stanislaus, Tuolumne, Mariposa, Merced, etc.; and despite its low and dangerous location, crowds of immigrants are moving in, and at the first of August its population was already from 1800 to 2000.

Several Frenchmen are established at Sacramento City, at Sutterville and Stockton. Some are engaged in trade, but most of them are keeping cafés, hotels and restaurants. At Stockton itself, the firm of Sainsilvain & Roussillon\* has founded a fine establishment and is doing a large business. Among the articles most in demand in all these places, there have been mentioned 67 to me particularly our wines, our brandies, our preserved fish and vegetables, shoes, shirts and clothing.

7. Pierre (Don Pedro) Sainsevain and Charles Roussillori. See Note 13 to Document III,*supra*.

It is twenty-eight to thirty leagues from Stockton to the Stanislaus Placer. In going there one crosses a sandy plain that extends fifteen or sixteen leagues into the interior from French Camp, two hours out of Stockton. The banks of the Stanislaus are themselves but layers of sand. Eighteen to twenty leagues from the San Joaquin, however, the character of the country changes suddenly. There the hills are composed of strata of clay, quartz, etc., and there also the gold-bearing soils begin, but the rich diggings are first reached ten or twelve leagues beyond, in the gulches between the higher hills. Here, as elsewhere along the same line, these form the foothills of the Sierra Nevada and are so much alike that when I visited the Stanislaus placers I might have thought myself at the “Dry Diggins” or at the other northern mines that I described in my report of August 17, 1848.

The Stanislaus placer mines extend for several leagues from north to south. The most important for size and richness are those called *del Barro* or Sullivan's (*Silivain's*) Diggings.\* This is a large, deep valley, about five or six miles in extent. It is estimated that over \$3,000,000 worth of gold has been taken out of this place in the past eight months. Hundreds of miners are still working there and they nearly all averred that the average daily yield per man was still an ounce and a half. But these valleys have a very deep layer of surface dirt and stones, so one must dig to a considerable depth to reach the gold, and as the holes filled with water, work could not be taken up again until July. Even now pumps must be used in some places to keep the water down. It is estimated that ten thousand

---

The inside story of the gold rush, by Jacques Antoine Moerenhout ... translated and edited from documents in the French archives by Abraham P. Nasatir, in collaboration with George Ezra Dane who wrote the introduction and conclusion <http://www.loc.gov/resource/calbk.018>

men are working in the various placers designated as the Stanislaus mines, and that their daily yield is at least 5,000 ounces.

8. *Cañada del Barro* ("Mud Canyon") was the scene of the remarkable treasure trove of Coronel's party from Los Angeles in 1848. Coronel, Antonio Francisco, *Cosas de California*, MS in Bancroft Library, summarized in Bancroft, *Hist. of Calif.*, VI, 78-81. Moerenhout's coupling of the names would indicate that this is the same place that the Americans called Sullivan's Diggings, on Sullivan's Creek which flows from Phoenix Lake into Woods' Creek from the east, four miles or so below Jamestown. Cf. Heckendorn & Wilson, *Miners' & Business Men's Directory*, Columbia, 1856, p. [105] which lists Sullivan's Creek, Sullivan's Wet Arroya and Sullivan's Dry Arroya as included under the Curtisville post office. Lewis C. Gunn recorded in his diary: "August 13 [1849] . . . At last we decided to go to Wood's, as it was within five miles of Sullivan's and Mormon and Sonora diggings . . . August 24. Went to Sullivan's Diggings, five miles off [from Jamestown]. Found five dollars in about one hour; felt quite elated with my success. Others here are doing well, but the labor is immense and requires several to work in company. They sink holes thirty feet deep, and while one keeps pumping out the water all the while, another digs the dirt, and a third and a fourth wash it. In some holes they have two pumps constantly at work. The scenery at Sullivan's is truly sublime; high hills and very steep. September 5... Walked down Wood's Creek as far as the mouth of Sullivan's Creek. Scenery very rough and sublime. The hills very high, in fact mountains, and very steep, so that we could scarcely ascend and descend them; in many places it was impossible." Gunn, Lewis C. and Elizabeth L., *Records of a California Family*, San Diego, 1928, pp. 61,65,67. Though Moerenhout includes the Sullivan's and Woods' Creek camps in the "Stanislaus Placer," they are in fact in the watershed of the Tuolumne River, into which Woods' Creek flows.

There are two sizeable settlements at the Stanislaus. One of them, called Jamestown,<sup>\*</sup> is almost entirely owned and inhabited by Americans. The second, called *Campo de los Sonoreños*, Sonoranian Camp,<sup>\*</sup> is composed of all nationalities. In the former possession of the land has been taken, and an alcalde elected by the residents themselves gives title. In both of these settlements streets have been laid out and the right of the first occupants of lots is recognized, that is to say, that they may have the exclusive use of them and rent or sell them if they have erected tents or *oramadas* or made any improvements whatever. The former [Jamestown] has from a thousand to twelve hundred inhabitants. The second [Sonoranian Camp] is smaller, but has a floating population of from 2,000 to 3,000 people at least. In both of these settlements there are well stocked stores, restaurants, cafés, billiard halls, etc., and in the evening when these fine tents are lighted and thousands of people are circulating through the streets of these strange towns, it is hard for one to believe that he is in a wild and uncivilized country, surrounded by Indian tribes and at the foot of the Sierra Nevada wilderness.

9. The first mining camp in this region appears to have been at Woods' Crossing, on Woods' Creek, both named for the Rev. James Woods, the leader of a "party of Philadelphians" who discovered this enormously

rich watercourse early in the summer of 1848. Jamestown, a few miles up the creek, was named for a lawyer, Colonel James, another "forty-eighter," whose promotion schemes incurred so much ill-will that for a while there was considerable dissent from immortalizing his name. Alley, B. F. (pub.), *History of Tuolumne County*, S. F., 1882, pp. 2-3. The two settlements were collectively known as the American Camp, or *Campo Americano*, as distinguished from the *Campo Sonoreno* or Sonoranian Camp. Heckendorn & Wilson, *Miners' & Business Men's Directory*, Columbia, 1856, p. 37.

10. The county histories have not been so careful to preserve the names of the "band of miners from Sonora, Mexico," who pushed up Woods' Creek beyond the Crossing in the summer of '48, shortly after the first arrivals, and established what became known as *Campo Sonoreno or de los Sonorenos*, and by the Americans progressively contracted from Sonoranian Camp to Sonorian or Sonoran Camp and finally to Sonora. The richness of the diggings in its vicinity swelled the cosmopolitan population to 5,000 by the end of 1849, but the Foreign Miners' tax of 1850 and accompanying persecutions caused an exodus estimated at from one-half to four-fifths of its inhabitants. *History of Tuolumne County*, *op. cit. supra*, at pp. 2-3,21; *Miners' & Business Men's Directory*, *op. cit. supra*, pp. 37-40.

68

At the time of my visit, toward the end of July, the heat was excessive, the ravages of disease had commenced and many were leaving the placers. Nevertheless the number of miners was still large, business was active and necessities such as meat, flour, rice, sugar, coffee and tea, wines and spirits were much in demand. French wines were extremely scarce and sold at three to four dollars a bottle.

There are many Frenchmen working in the mines there,\* and some who have stores with stocks of goods of considerable value, and they asked me to appoint someone to protect their persons and their property. I felt that I should grant their request and appointed as consular agent, M. Chevalier, a surgeon, whom everyone pointed out as the person most capable and best fitted to look after their interests. I had him recognized in this capacity by the alcalde,\* the only American authority in the region.

11. Quite a number of Frenchmen figured in the early history of this mining region. *Hist. of Tuolumne Co.*, *op. cit. supra*, pp. 1-21. Their names and exploits are given in Daniel Lévy's *Les Français en Californie*, S. F., 1884, pp. 88-99.

12. Ernest de Massey, writing on February 1, 1850, says that Dr. Chevalier was the "son of a highly respected citizen whose place of business is in La Place de la Loge at Langres," and that "some say he has gone to the mines; others that he is living at Mazatlan, Mexico, and practicing his profession." Massey, Ernest de, *A Frenchman in the Gold Rush*, S. F., 1927, p. 30 (or *California Historical Society Quarterly*, V, 25.)

From Stanislaus I went to the placers of French Camp Creek (*Arroyo de los Franceses*), of the Mokelumne, the Cosumnes and Dry Creek. They are equally rich and really only a continuation

of the gold country, but they take their names from the nearest rivers. In these placers, however, the miners are more scattered, and there are nowhere such settlements as those that have been established at the Stanislaus.

Everywhere in all these placers washing and digging are carried on actively but, as was the case last year, without any method or order. As every man is acting for himself, it has been impossible to organize any regular work. It is because of this individual work and ownership that these mining operations are a veritable lottery in which chance brings fortunes to some in a few months or sometimes in a few days, while others hardly earn enough to buy their food. This irregular manner of working the mines and the resultant great differences in the product of work explain the extraordinary movement of shifting that keeps a fifth of the miners always on the road from one placer to another, so that by their very inconstancy they lose precious time, increase their expenses and end by abandoning everything and returning discouraged and destitute.\*

13. The first alcalde of Sonoranian Camp, R. S. Ham, was self-elected to that office in the fall of 1848, and held it by sufferance of the population until the friends of one Atkins, accused of murder, sought to secure more temperate justice by the impromptu election of a successor to Alcalde Ham. The choice fell upon James Frazier (or Fraser), a Scotchman, who presided at the trial of Atkins, and when the prisoner was found guilty of murder, sentenced him to pay a fine of \$500 and leave the country. The friends of Atkins, dissatisfied with the results of their electioneering, are said to have been ready to subscribe a purse of \$500 to pay the fine of anyone who would kill the alcalde. But his popularity with the populace grew to be such that when the first general election was held, August 1, 1849, for delegates to the Constitutional convention and other offices, but not for local alcalde, Frazier's admirers, unable to demonstrate their esteem by ballots, signed and presented to him the following tribute:

Sonoranian Camp, 2d August, 1849.

“To Mr. James Fraser: If there had been a vacancy in the office of local alcalde for this camp, and we had consequently voted yesterday for a person to fill that office, we would have voted for you

in preference to any other candidate. "We remain your obedient Servants..." *Hist. of Tuolumne County, op. cit. supra*, pp. 13-16. The date of the document above quoted would indicate that in all probability Frazier was the alcalde with whom Moerenhout opened diplomatic relations and who issued whatever *exequatur* fortyniner diplomacy may have required to establish Dr. Chevalier as Consular agent of France at the Southern Mines.

During this second visit I have renewed my conviction that the hills which form the gulches and valleys are the true repositories of gold, where sooner or later will be found the mines from which comes the gold that is now found nearby. For I have noticed that wherever the gulches are deep and the hillsides sheer or steep, and where consequently the water runs in rapid torrents at times of rain or melting snow, the gold is found in large pieces, mixed with or attached to pieces of rock, of which I have seen some that weighed twenty pounds and contained six or seven pounds of gold. Whereas, in the gulches between the rounded, gently sloping hills, the gold is fine and frequently in flakes as in the streams and rivers. I have even noticed that wherever the hillsides are broken toward the bottom by shelves or plateaus, the coarsest gold is always found in the dips of these plateaus <sup>69</sup> and in much greater abundance than in the actual gulches of the hills. In some parts of the Stanislaus placers these hillsides have been the object of new and very profitable mining, and if they continue to produce as well as they do now, they will add much to the washings in all the placers.

It is impossible here to give any exact idea of the number of the miners and the amount of gold produced, but although the average production per man has decreased because of the great number working, the total is very large. For a long time yet it will be a source of immense wealth that will stimulate trade, attract immigration, encourage and aid the enterprising spirit of the American people, and thus in a few years will change this once desert country into one of the richest and most flourishing states of the Union.

When I reached the Calaveras I was told that an American lady had just brought in a Frenchman who had died a few hours before, and I was asked to look into the matter. I went to the place where the carriage was, by which he had been brought in, and the lady told me that he had been sick in her

house for five days, and that as she had to move, she had taken him in the carriage, but he had died on the way. She had not permitted anyone to search him until some witnesses should be present. The name that he had given in dying was Siniac.

I had the man's body taken out of the carriage, and although it was still warm, a surgeon whom I had called pronounced him dead. In the pockets of his trousers were found three keys and a small purse containing gold that I had weighed (27 1/8 ounces). The body being still warm, I thought it prudent not to bury it yet and had it kept through the night. The next day I had it buried on the slope of the hill near the river and drew up a report in English that the American surgeon and another of his compatriots signed. The lady called my attention to a person who had taken care of the sick man for five days. To this person I gave an ounce of gold and half an ounce to those who had watched over the body during the night and had dug the grave.

According to reports that I have just received, Siniac was his true name. He was carpenter on the French three-master *Le Chateau Briant*, and left one or two trunks in San Francisco. As soon as I have the necessary information I shall have the honor of sending you a copy of the report, the 27 ounces of gold and the proceeds of all that belonged to this sailor.

With the greatest respect and devotion, etc.,

The Consul of the French Republic at Monterey, J. A. MOERENHOUT.

\*

14. “. . . Then, when thou hast returned, in sorrow shalt thou find that thine old claim is worked out, and yet no pile made thee to hide in the ground, or in an old boot beneath thy bunk, or in buckskin bag or bottle underneath thy cabin; but hast paid all that was in thy purse away, worn out thy boots and thy garments, so that there is nothing good about them but the pockets, and thy patience is likened unto thy garments; and at last thou shalt hire thy body out to make thy board and save thy bacon.” *Miners' Ten Commandments* (broadside), No. II.

#### DOCUMENT XIV \*

1. Correspondance Consulaire; Box Monterey, Correspondence of Moerenhout; no number. Extract sent to Ministry of Commerce, March 2, 1850.

## MOERENHOUT TO MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Yerba Buena, San Francisco Bay,

Monsieur le Ministre: October 28th, 1849.

I have been in this port since the 2d of this month and have tried in vain to obtain a list of the ships that have put in here since the first of January, 70 1849. There is no exact list anywhere, neither in the harbor master's office nor even at the Custom House where the names of the ships are inscribed in scattered books that are constantly in use. I shall, nevertheless, continue to work on it and will try to send it to you by the steamer sailing on the 15th of next November.

I am quite disappointed not to be able to send you this list, for it would give you a better idea of the present importance of this port where more than 200 large ships are still at anchor,<sup>\*</sup> where the duties paid at the Custom House exceed the figure of \$100,000 per month, and the activity of which resembles and exceeds that of the principal ports of the States or of Europe. As to the town itself, its progress is unexampled in the history of new settlements, even in the United States. Entire streets are lined with fine houses in the space of a few days. It already has eighteen to twenty thousand inhabitants, and there is not the slightest doubt that before the first of next January its population will be thirty to forty thousand souls, at least.<sup>\*</sup>

2. A statement of the collector of the port on Nov. 10, 1849, placed the arrivals since April 1 at 697, of which 401 were American and 296 foreign, and including of course some who made more than one visit. Three hundred and twelve vessels were reported as then lying in the port. During the year ending April 15, 1850, there were 1,113 arrivals, 695 of them American. Bancroft, *History of California*, VII, 123-24.

3. These estimates seem somewhat excessive, though the increase of the city's population was enormous during the winter, with the reflux from the mines. Bancroft, *op. cit.*, VI, 168, says 6,000 in August, 20,000 in midwinter; Taylor, Bayard, *Eldorado*, p. 205, says 15,000 in October; Soulé, *et al.*, *Annals of San Francisco*, pp. 219, 226, 244, say at least 20,000 by the end of the year, probably nearer 25,000.

Sacramento City, which I had the honor to describe to you in my preceding dispatch, continues to grow in an equally extraordinary manner. There are not enough ships to carry the lumber necessary for the buildings that they wish to construct there. Furthermore, it is the stopping place for the emigrants who come overland from the United States to California and most of them want to locate

and make their homes there. It already has from eight to ten thousand inhabitants and its growth will be greater and faster now that steamers of shallow draft have established prompt and regular communication between that port and Yerba Buena.

Stockton also continues to grow as do eight or ten other towns that have been founded under various names in the environs of San Francisco Bay and in the Sacramento Valley. The one that seems destined to make the greatest progress, however, is the Pueblo of San Jose, situated two leagues to the south of San Francisco Bay in one of the most beautiful and most fertile valleys of this country and in a region that affords all resources and all elements needed to assist in the establishment of a large city. Moreover, since it was chosen as the capital of Lower [Upper] California by the district delegates assembled at Monterey to draw up and discuss a projected constitution for this country, \* a great deal of land has been purchased there and property has increased from a hundred to a thousand per cent. in value.

4. As to the calling of the Constitutional Convention of August 1, 1849, see Note 8 to Doc. VII, *supra*.

This ever progressive and marvelous growth of this country is due principally to the affluence of a whole people and to the large sums acquired by thousands of individuals since the discovery of the placers, which have given to the immigrants the desire and the means to establish themselves and have developed to the highest degree in this country the enterprising spirit of the American nation. Under this influence and aided by the causes that I have mentioned, that is to say, the general affluence, high wages, the needs of the immigrants, and the large sums in circulation, business continues to show an activity that more and more surpasses all probabilities and exceeds the most foresighted estimates. Entire cargoes are still readily disposed of and with the exception of a few articles, among which unfortunately are brandies, merchandise continues to sell well, some articles with large profit, such as flour and wines, which have gone up, the former from \$ 12 to \$20 a sack or barrel, the latter from \$20 and \$25 to \$75 and \$80 a cask. Everything seems to indicate that if the arrivals, especially from the United States, let up a bit, this country will continue to be not only the largest but also the most profitable market for foreign commerce in these seas.

The placers, these inexhaustible sources of wealth and true causes of the marvelous progress of this country, continue to furnish such quantities of gold that it is no longer possible to make even an approximate calculation of their production. The old diggings are still rich and productive and new and important discoveries are announced every day. Recently, thousands of people [have gone] to the north-northwest of the Sacramento River toward the 41st degree [of latitude] and in the same [?] longitude as the other more southerly placers.\* All the rivers, all the streams, and all the gulches there are found to be extremely rich repositories of gold, which is found strewn in flakes or disseminated in grains and nuggets of all sizes.

5. The reference is probably to the Trinity River mines, which would be roughly "to the north-northwest of the Sacramento River" and not far from the 41° N. Lat. They are of course not in the same degree of longitude as the "more southerly placers," but this error may perhaps be attributed to the copyist, who noted a difficulty in deciphering the original at this point. The original discovery of gold in the Trinity region is attributed to Major Pierson B. Reading, who went there with a party of three white men and about seventy Indian laborers in July, 1848, and took out \$80,000 in six weeks from what came to be known as Reading's Bar. Pierson B. Reading, anon. biography in *Quarterly of Society of California Pioneers*, Vol. VII, p. 137. His return in 1849 was followed by a rush that had grown to be the principal "excitement" of the day when Moerenhout wrote. It was only a few days later that the Gregg expedition set out from Weaverville to explore the lower reaches of the Trinity. After they had found the way to Trinidad and Humboldt bays, thousands of miners came to this region by sea, in 1850. Cutten, C. P., "The Humboldt Bay Region," in *Quarterly of Society of California Pioneers*, Vol. IX, pp. 10-17; Coy, Owen C., *The Humboldt Bay Region*, Los Angeles, 1929, pp. 36-48.

Therefore, Monsieur le Ministre, I must repeat what I had the honor to tell you in my preceding dispatch, that it is no longer possible to judge the extent or limits of this country's needs. Large quantities of goods of all kinds are now being shipped to the settlements on the Sacramento 'and the San Joaquin from whence they are taken to the placers where all work has again taken on an extraordinary activity and where thousands of people propose to pass the winter and must supply themselves for at least four or five months. Furthermore, thousands of immigrants continue to arrive by all routes. Eight to ten thousand have just entered the country by way of the Sierra Nevada and are, as I have had the honor to say above, completely destitute. Those who come by other ways and who wish to locate permanently here, to build or to rent houses, have nothing of what they need to decorate and furnish them, none of the necessities for a family or a household, and their original expenditures simply to fill their most elementary needs amount to considerable sums.

To these considerations regarding the condition and needs of those arriving in this country and the resultant consumption of goods and merchandise, must always be added the extraordinary resources that are at their disposal in a country where, besides the placers, an artisan earns from \$12 to \$20 a day, mechanics and other workmen from \$5 to \$ 10, and where servants, male and female, draw from \$ 100 to \$200 per month. But what disturbs business in this country, makes it uncertain, and makes shipments hazardous, is that speculative purchases are impossible here for the reasons that I have pointed out in several of my preceding dispatches, and that. goods are purchased and 72 disposed of only in proportion to the needs of the moment and rise or fall only according to the exigencies of the moment and to the quantities available.

Another thing that now hinders speculation in goods is the enormous capital employed in the land speculations that now constitute the dominating and general passion of all the country. The fortunes acquired by these speculations are so large and so extraordinary' that they excite the leisure classes and the immigrants even more than do the mines and afford temptations from which few of those who arrive here with any capital can restrain themselves. I must add, however, that these speculations have been justified so far by the fact that in most of the new towns the price of land has kept rising and that as soon as lots are improved the rents are so high that one or two years suffice to repay the cost to the purchaser.

M. Guise\* not having arrived yet, the captains of French ships and the French businessmen and residents of this port all have need of my presence--of a French official both to fulfill the formalities that the laws of their country require and to defend their interests and their rights before the authorities of this country--and they are continually complaining and asking me to take up my residence in this port. Therefore, at their request and in accordance with the advice of Rear Admiral Le Goarant de Tromelin, who visited the port of San Solito [Sausalito] in this bay at the end of September, I decided to move to Yerba Buena and to abandon my residence at Monterey which requires considerable expense even during my absence and where my intervention is rarely needed. Here. on the contrary, the French ships always need the assistance of the Consul. In the month of August the Chilian ship *La Californie Dorée*, chartered and officered by Frenchmen, was seized,

together with the remainder of her cargo. Arriving in this port two or three days after the seizure, I was fortunate enough to be able to have the ship and all that remained aboard restored. Simply to give an appearance of legality to their original proceeding, however, and not to appear to do a favor in an affair where they were within their rights, [the American officials] sentenced the captain to pay a fine of \$500. I afterward obtained permission for the ship to load an outward cargo and by these concessions not only prevented a large loss but procured a profitable result for an enterprise that might have been ruinous.

6. Édouard Guys, who had previously served the French Foreign Office at Bogotá and at Panama, was appointed consular agent and then Vice Consul of France at San Francisco in the spring of 1849, evidently in response to Moerenhout's report of the great need for an agent there to serve the French ships and immigrants who came with the Gold Rush. Foreign Minister Drouyn de l'Huys to Ambassador Rush, March 2, 1849, enclosed in Rush to Sec. of State No. 77, State Dept. (Washington), Despatches: France, Vol. 31, MS; Ambassador Poussin to Sec. of State Clayton, Washington, March 15, 1849, and March 30, 1849, State Dept., Notes from: France, Vol. 14, MS; Clayton to Poussin, Washington, March 17 and March 31, 1849, State Dept., Notes to: France, Vol. 6, MS. Guys evidently arrived and replaced Moerenhout within a few days after the latter wrote the above letter, for Lévy, *Les Français en Californie*, S. F. 1884, pp. 63,355, says that Guys served at San Francisco from Nov. 3, 1849, until July 22 or 25, 1850, when he was replaced by Patrice Dillon, Consul General, who was to figure in the embarrassing diplomatic incident that arose out of recruiting for the filibustering expedition of Count Gaston Raoul de Raousset-Boulbon. Guys was not up to the calibre of his predecessor. His functions seem to have been confined to protesting seizures of French vessels and cargoes, particularly those in which he was interested, for he did not have Moerenhout's ethical feelings as to the impropriety of mixing business with diplomacy. See State Dept., Despatches: France, Vol. 33, and Notes from: France, Vol. 14. We may dismiss him with this judgment of one of his compatriots: "Unfortunately he is head of a colony of immigrants and more interested in his own private affairs than in those of the consulate . . . has neither the funds, time nor character honorably to hold the position he is occupying... as he must keep up his position and needs from thirty to forty dollars a day for running expenses, his salary is hardly adequate. For this reason he has had to raise money from outside sources. It is now said that he is ruined and that he leaves on the next steamer for Panama, both to get away from a disastrous bankruptcy and an onerous consulship." Massey, Ernest de, *A Frenchman in the Gold Rush*, S. F., California Historical Society, 1927, pp. 30, 46, and California Historical Society *Quarterly*, V, 25,41.

I will not mention now a hundred other situations in which I have been able to help my compatriots as well here as in Monterey and in other places; for so far, the American authorities have sanctioned my intervention everywhere as the legal defender of the French, whose difficulties frequently arise from their inability to understand or from having recourse to no one who speaks their language and English well enough to make known their grievances and to defend their rights.

As I had the honor to state above, Rear Admiral Le Goarant de Tromelin came here from the Sandwich Islands toward the end of September but he <sup>73</sup> thought it prudent to anchor at San Solito

at the entrance of the bay in order to prevent desertion. I went aboard on the 2nd of October and he was already about to leave, for, despite his precautions, twenty-seven men had deserted in one of the ship's boats. Eight or ten had been caught, but the temper of the crew seemed such that the Admiral thought it prudent to sail immediately. He did not visit the port of Yerba Buena.

I end this dispatch by reminding Your Excellency once more that my position in this country is becoming more and more critical, that my expenses are enormous and that without an increase of salary I shall be obliged to resign from my post.

With the greatest respect,

The Consul of the French Republic,

Acting at San Francisco,

J. A. MOERENHOUT.

75

## CONCLUSION

AT THIS POINT Moerenhout's story was interrupted by the long-deferred recall. The duties that he had assumed at San Francisco were taken over in November, 1849 by Edouard Guys, who also fell heir to the difficulty of meeting the high cost of living with the meagre salary of a French Consul. He became enmeshed in further financial troubles of his own making, so that his replacement by Consul-General Patrice Dillon in July, 1850, afforded a welcome escape from creditors.\*

1. See note 6 to Doc. XIV, *supra*.

Moerenhout's lineal successor in the Monterey post was Jules Lombard. After a disagreeable trip via Panama in the company of uncouth emigrants and adventurers not at all to the liking of this Parisian gentleman, he arrived at Monterey in June, 1850, to vent his accumulated spleen.\*

2. Lombard to Minister, No. 1, Monterey, June 27, 1850, Aff. Etrang., Corr. Polit. Monterey.

It did not take him long to realize what Moerenhout had already reported, that the importance of the *famoso puerto de Monterey* was now only historical. The touch of gold that had turned the village of Yerba Buena into a metropolis and scattered new cities along the rivers and among the foothills, had blighted the old capital. There were no clearances to be attended to because no ships entered the port, no call for the protection of France because there were no Frenchmen there to be protected and as John Phoenix would say, “nothing, indeed, to protect them from.” In a word, Monterey was dead, and there was nothing at all for the Vice-Consul of France to do there. Lombard therefore, with the sanction of Consul-General Dillon, constituted himself a roving reporter, much as Moerenhout had done. But his reports were of quite a different hue.

A spurt of enthusiasm, engendered by a trip to the mines in the fall of 1850, soon wore off, and Lombard's pessimism increased with each succeeding report. There is doubtless much truth in his reflection of the disillusionment of the many luckless fortune seekers. The French, seemingly, had poorer success than others because of their constitutional inability to get along with each other well enough to work in company, and they had suffered much from the Foreign miners' tax and attendant abuses. By the time of Lombard's visit, however, the tax had been reduced to a reasonable figure, and an industrious Frenchman might hope to average from two to three dollars a day above expenses.\*

3. Lombard to Dillon, no number, San Francisco, Oct. 7, 1850, in Archives, *loc. cit. supra*.

The succeeding winter brought a tale of misery from the Vice-Consul. He dared say, “without fear of contradiction, that the rashness of some, the thoughtless enthusiasm of others, the superficial study of most and their personal interest placed above all others,” had greatly deceived the public, and had given birth in France to hopes that unfortunately could never be realized. That the disillusionment was delayed made it all the more bitter. Most of the emigrants were ruined, many were dead, and those who still had any resources left, were hastening to use them for the purpose of returning home. For by January of 1851, Lombard reported, the yield of the placer mines had diminished to such an extent that it was an exceptional miner who could earn a bare living. “As for the others--and they are the majority--weakened by incessant privation, worn out by the heavy work

and their health undermined by sickness, they are flocking back to the cities, and asking of public charity the food that this new style *Eldorado* has so obstinately denied them.”\*

4. Lombard to Minister, No. 4, Monterey, Jan. 20, 1851, *loc. cit. supra*.

When Lombard's prophesy of failure for the Gold Bluff rush was realized he felt justified in predicting that “without the slightest doubt” the new ventures in quartz mining would have the same fate. Moerenhout, it will be remembered, had foreseen that the quartz mines would tap the hidden sources from which the crumbs gathered in the placers had come. But Lombard could see nothing good in the raw country or its rude society. In his estimation California was, financially speaking, a complete liability for the United States, and so far as morals were concerned, nothing short of a public calamity.\* In this latter respect he was not so far wrong, for he was describing the era of banditry and corruption that culminated, in San Francisco, with the Vigilance Committee of 1851, which Lombard applauded in his final letter, as the first augury of a better future for the new state.\*

5. Lombard to Minister, No. 7, Monterey, Mar. 20, 1851, *loc. cit. supra*.

6. Lombard to Minister, No. 11, Monterey, Aug. 30, 1851, *loc. cit. supra*.

At Paris, Lombard's gloomy reports had not been received with the same confidence that had been accorded to Moerenhout's balanced judgment. Then, too, it seems that the government wished to encourage immigration to and trade with California, for the benefit of French commerce. So the minister, judging that Lombard's letters “paint the present condition and future of California in too dark colors,” out of accord with “the opinions of other explorers,” “thought it best not to publish them.” Lombard was complimented, however, on the way in which he had handled the only consular business of any importance that had come into the deserted port of Monterey during his otherwise empty administration of a year and a half--the liquidation of the ill-named “La Fortune” Company and the care of the badly deceived immigrants left stranded in Monterey by the company's ship *Courrier de Cherbourg*.\*

7. Minister to Lombard, No. 1, Paris, Jan. 31, 1852, *loc. cit. supra*. See also, regarding La Fortune Co. and the *Courrier de Cherbourg*, Lombard to Minister, Nos. 6, 8, and 9, Monterey, Feb. 10, Apr. 25 and June 14, 1851, *loc. cit. supra*.

Lombard had already returned to Paris when, on March 23, 1852, he was informed that he was to be sent to Panama, and that Moerenhout would take over the Monterey post again, with the title of “Honorary Consul of the Secnd Class,” by appointment of the Prince President Louis Napoleon, dated March 11th.\*

8. Minister to Lombard, No. 2, Paris, Mar. 23, 1852,*loc. cit. supra*.

His faithful and intelligent service finally rewarded, Moerenhout returned to California, accompanied by his daughter. His home in Monterey had meanwhile gone under the hammer, with great loss to him,\* but conditions were 77 more settled and life not so difficult as it had been during the first strenuous years of the gold rush. Again there was little for the consul to do at Monterey but report conditions and events in California, and this Moerenhout continued to do with his characteristic insight and excellent style. His careful and unprejudiced analyses of the conditions that produced the Vigilance Committee of 1856 and the Know-Nothing Party\* are particularly keen interpretations of the times, and it is to be hoped that they may soon be published.

9. Moerenhout to Minister, Nos. 23, 35, 3, 4, 5, Sept. 15 and Nov. 15, 1855, July 10 and 30 and Oct. 18, 1856, Archives of the Ministry of For. Aff., Paris: Corresp. Pol., Ser. Etats-Unis, vol. 115, folios 168-171, 95-102*verso*, 114-118*verso*, 209-214, 252-253. Other reports deal with the filibustering expeditions in Lower California and Sonora, and the Dillon affair. Moerenhout to Minister, Nos. 12, 15, 19, 38, Dec. 15, 1853, Jan. 31, May 16, 1854, Jan. 21, 1856,*loc. cit.*, Ser. Mexique, vol. 41, folios 330-333, ser. Etats-Unis, vol. 110, fol. 129-130, vol. 114, fol. 50-51, 353.

In 1859, the French Foreign Ministry finally recognized how relatively unimportant Monterey had become, and transferred Moerenhout's Vice-Consulate to Los Angeles, where he was ceremoniously inaugurated on October 29th.\* He entered enthusiastically into the life of that growing town, and became widely known throughout Southern California, where his character and dignity commanded great respect. In 1860 he helped to organize the French Benevolent Society of Los Angeles and served as its first president.\* In 1876 the old consul presided over a spirited celebration of the centenary of American independence. His last days were disturbed by the announcement, in 1879, that the Los Angeles Vice-Consulate was to be suppressed by the Third Republic, then hard beset by the depression of the late seventies. Though a small pension was

allotted him, he did not long survive the blow. On July 11, 1879, the long and honorable career of Jacques Antoine Moerenhout came to its close, in his eighty-third year, at his home on Main St., near Third.\*

10. Newmark, Harris, *Sixty Years in Southern California*, 3d ed., 1930, p. 254.

11. Loyer and Beaudreau, *Le Guide Francais de Los Angeles et dis Sud de la Californie*, Los Angeles, 1932.

12. Letters in the Collection of Dr. Edwin M. Clinton of Los Angeles, Moerenhout's great-grandson, to whom thanks are due, as also to his great-granddaughter, Mrs. J. A. Rickman, for permission to reproduce the self-portrait.

Through the vicissitudes of three quarters of a century he had served his country well, as soldier of Napoleon's *Grande Armée*, as explorer and geographer in the South Seas, where he had played an important part in the acquisition of the Society Islands. It was with the thought that the French empire might obtain another foothold in the Pacific that he was appointed to the post at Monterey in 1845. If fate had favored France in the project, there can be little doubt that Moerenhout would have been equal to the task in California as he had been in Tahiti. History assigned to him a smaller role here, but what he had to do he did well. He was no ordinary man, and his letters from California take on greater historical value and more interest when it is realized that they come from the same hand that wrote the monumental *Voyages aux Iles du Grande Océan*,\* that painted delicate miniatures on ivory--and once caressed a queen.

13. Paris, 1837. See also his "Notice sur Plusieurs Voyages.. ." in *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, Paris, Jan. 1835, pp. 22-35. He was a corresponding member of several learned societies, including the *Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, the *Société Orientale* and the *Institut d'Afrique*.

JACKSON'S MAP OF THE GOLD REGIONS, 1849 Reproduced from the only known copy, now in the collection of Thomas W. Norris, Esq.