The Beginnings of The French Connection in North America

Vers les champ auriferes

In 1535, 300 years before the California Gold Rush, the French explorer Jacques Cartier and his men were in desperate condition after a particularly severe winter in Newfoundland. Already 25 lay dead and not one of the remaining survivors was not suffering from the ravages of Scurvy. Fortunately for history a group of local Indians took pity on them, and told Cartier that their medicine man had the perfect cure. Shoving their prejudices aside, they went to the medicine man. The miracle brew of this wise man was so simple that Cartier and his men nearly rejected it at first. Without any hocus-pocus, the medicine man simply plucked a handful of pine needles from a nearby tree and boiled them in a pot for a few minutes. Then he gave each one a cup of “soup”. Although skeptical, they did as they were told and the soup transformed their health within a week. This is recorded because they lived to tell the tale.

Voyages to Canada 1534-35 J. Cartier

Cartier later sailed up the St. Lawrence River to present day Montreal and claimed all of Canada, (Kanata - from Huron-Iriquois tongue) for France. He had no idea of its size. The British objected and armed conflict resulted until 1759 when, during the French & Indian War, the British General Wolf, tricked the French General Montcalm to sortie from the Citadel of Quebec and defeated him on the nearby Plains of Abraham. Both Generals fell in the battle. In an unusual alliance, French and English have endured as the Official Languages of the Province of Quebec. Over the next century the French canoed on up the river to the Great Lakes and beyond. Les Voyageurs became the rock stars of their era, singing as they paddled. They preceded the Mountain Men who inaugurated the fur trapping era throughout the Rocky Mtns. They and/or their descendents wrote home to France, telling of the 1848 Gold Strike in California....and the rest.... or all....is History.

L. Clark, editor
A fascinating continuance of that history was re-enacted this September amid the French place names, family names and company names that had been a whisper beneath the official state records of, The Malakoff, better known now as Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park.

The day paid homage to, not only the French heritage of the vicinity, but to those who have brought that whisper to a crescendo. Namely, Archaeologist Mark Selverston, Emcee of the event, whose diligent research compiled the stories, reports, legends and artifacts into a workable tome and who introduced Guests of Honor, Emmanuel LeBrun-Damiens, Consul Generale of France, from San Francisco, and Guy Micheleir, Honorary Consul from Sacramento. The pair lauded the effort to share the story and for the positive effect it is having for mutual relations.

Noted French Academic and Author Claudine Chalmers told of the initial French arrival in San Francisco and their ultimate trials as they journeyed into the gold fields.

Author and Archeologist Chris Ward led a throng of “Gravers” to the North Bloomfield Cemetery, where he interpreted the names and stories of the many plots marked with French flags.
With the hush of a curtain across a small adit, the crowd watched and listened in rapt attention, as hand carved puppets cavorted about the stage to tell the story of how the Malakoff got its name.

Expertly manipulated by Laura Jean Coats and her able assistants Barbara Ward and Mary Kashuba, the characters held the audience mesmerised, especially the children, before the aptly named, "Theatre of Awe".

Throughout the festival, the sounds of French songs, dittys and anthems, carried over the visitors as they ate, drank and sang, along with the Beaucoup Chapeaux Quartet.

Congratulations to Grand Prize Raffle Winner Sarah Grew, from N. San Juan, of a week on the Riviera, Courtesy of Dr. Claudine Chalmers.
A Boy Baby Born to the Bridgeport Diggins

Carson Ryan Randar arrived on June 13th, at 10:10 a.m. weighing in at 7 pounds, 14 ounces, with eyes wide open, ready to greet the world. He is happy, healthy, and has all 10 fingers and 10 toes. The proud parents are State Park Interpreter I, Jenna Randar and State Park Peace Officer, Ranger Ryan Randar.

E Clampus Vitus Chapter 10, has been busy, as time permits, endeavoring to finish the back room of the Barber Shop. That space, which may become an office in the future, had been partially finished years ago but fell victim to Hantavirus protocols causing a halt for the ensuing decade. They hope to be finished soon.

Lower photos by L. Clark
The trees are turning a brilliant red in North Bloomfield as fall comes to Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park. The change of season is a reminder that summer is over and the park will be going quiet as the winter takes over. Looking back on our activities in these last few months, we have much to celebrate that made this summer special.

Our Discover Malakoff series continued with an August hike with our own Mark Michalski, which was quite a success. Even the warm weather didn’t deter the hikers from learning more about the mining history of the Diggins.

We celebrated the French aspect of that history in our signature event, the French Connection. Again this year, we relived that era, enjoying the food, music and stories of long ago. For our own version of a spooky October event, we had Chris Ward lead folks thru the cemetery telling stories of those who now rest there. After that, we enjoyed a campfire and more stories – and s’mores too!

We’ll be focusing on the North Bloomfield Schoolhouse as we wind down the year’s events with a walk on November 10th with Denise Jaffke, our local DPR Staff Archeologist. More details on that shortly, so check our website, and face book page for more information. October also brings a lot of activity for our group, but mostly focused on our work to support the park.

We’ll be hosting all of the cooperating associations in the Sierra District - from Bodie & Plumas to Lake Tahoe, and all of the local ones as well– as we meet to share ideas, and information to help us be even more successful in our efforts to raise funds and recognition for our state parks. We’ll end the month with our own FNB&MD retreat, where we’ll review this year and set our course for 2019.

As the month winds down, we’re celebrating our latest success – the Foster Family Foundation has again agreed to support the Environmental Living Program by giving us a grant of $10,000 to cover most of the costs of upgrading our housing for students from tents to “prospector cabins”. This is a substantial improvement, and will allow us to bring larger public school groups to the park year-round. We’ll be looking to raise the additional funds promptly so we can get these ready for our spring students to enjoy.

Please consider making a donation to support this project, and the many others on tap at the park.

Here’s wishing you the joys of the fall season, with an invitation to come up to Malakoff Diggins with your camera and your curiosity to discover this hidden gem.

We look forward to seeing you!

Holly Mitten
Texas Tommy  
The Rose of Nevada City

The Belmont Rest Home in San Francisco where Rose had just moved was a sparsely decorated, sterile environment – a stark contrast to the parlor houses she had furnished and managed in her younger years. As Rose watched her sister’s slow, steady breathing she thought back to the promise she had made to take care of Buena. On a night so long ago news the Ellis girls’ father had died sent Buena into shock. Doctors performed a lobotomy on the distressed woman which left her brain damaged. Rose pledged to care for her only living relative for the rest of her life.

Rose shuffled over to a large bureau and removed a .38 caliber, nickel-plated revolver. Using all the strength in both her aged hands she pulled the hammer back and held the weapon to her sister’s ear. A shot rang out and Buena was gone. A second shot fired. Rose fell in a heap on the floor, the smoking gun clutched in her hand.

Rose Aline Ellis was born in 1878. Her father was a wealthy, South Dakota miner. Her mother died when Rose and her sister were very young. The girl’s father doted on his daughters, giving them every advantage he could afford. After learning about the business opportunities on the West Coast, he moved his family to San Francisco. He hoped to earn enough to secure a future for his daughters.

Left with the awesome responsibility of caring for her handicapped sister, Rose decided to embark on the world’s oldest profession. Prostitution was a lucrative business and soon Rose managed parlor houses up and down the Bay Area’s red light district.

Eleven years later she opened her first house in Nevada City, called the Golden Gate Amusement Company. Rose used the considerable profits from the house to open a grand nightclub that catered to both men and women. It was a fashionable saloon with sparkling chandeliers, red velvet drapes, a large stage and an orchestra pit complete with instruments. Champagne flowed from fountains and the finest food was served. Six weeks after the Heidelberg Club opened the building caught fire and burned to the ground. Nevada County residents speculated that a jealous housewife torched the brothel, but no proof of that ever materialized.

Soiled Dove by Neil Boyle
Rose’s attention shifted solely to her brothel where she charged clients $2.50 for the company of one of her girls. Many of the ladies made as much as $50 a night. Rose received twenty percent of their earnings while lavishing parties and gifts on her employees, and food for the poor, and orphans. Whenever a miner died from an on the job injury, a wagon load of groceries and firewood would anonymously appear on the widow’s doorstep. Truly, a Hooker with a Heart of Gold.

“She was driven by an undying devotion to her sister…. Even in death Texas Tommy had class and courage. So we close this sad story with Jesus’ admonishment in his Sermon on the Mount, ’Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.’”  

San Francisco Chronicle

Condensed from Cowgirl Magazine,  
Wild Women Wednesday, by Chris Enss  
L. Clark, Ed.

Give em’ the gate.

The Sierra District Stabilization Crew, led by Juan Lopez and Rob Hunzeker have replaced the gate, fence and walkway around the Marshall House, plus a new hydrant cover and Fire Hose Box.

With one finger pressure, the new hinges smoothly open the access leading up to the front door, effectively allowing an easy foray to that place.  

Ed.

Brooke Betz,
Senior Park Aide par excellence is in her fifth year at Malakoff Diggins and the park would be a poor place without her hard work. In addition to overseeing the day to day visitor services needs, giving tours, collecting fees, etc., she is the Coordinator for School Tours, Environmental Living and Volunteers…..and is the eyes and ears of the place.

A job well done, indeed!  

Ed.
Under the Guidance of

HistoriCorps Project Supervisor Craig Asher (blue hard-hat) and Brady Adams, (white hard-hat, Instructor for On-Site restoration of Historic Buildings, with his class from Alfred University in Upstate New York), a new porch and porch roof is installed on the Carter House at North Bloomfield.

Working from a hydraulic lift basket, crew replaced corrugated metal siding on the North Bloomfield School cupola with wood, which originally encased the tower. Rotting foundation beams were removed and new beams now stabilize the structure.

For the only recorded time since the school closed in 1941 the interior has been cleaned. The effect is dazzling. HistoriCorps’ finished their scheduled projects on October 15, having helped preserve part of Malakoff History.

Photos by Tom Stark and Doug & Shirley Moon

Editor
First Stagecoach Robbery in the California Gold Rush

At first it was single bandits who would accost travelers along a lonely spot on the trail and relieve them of their hard earned gold at gunpoint. One such man was Reelfoot Williams, who first gained a reputation as a gambler and petty criminal around the mining camp of Downieville on the Yuba River north of Nevada City. In 1851 he’d been arrested for highway robbery but won an acquittal. The next day the judge was accosted by a gunman on the Slug Canyon trail and recognized the robber as Williams, the man whose trial he had just presided over. When the judge, a noted gambler himself, protested to Williams that he had lost all his money in a poker game the night before, the bandit let him go and promptly robbed the next man who came along of $700.

By 1852 Williams had hooked up with Rattlesnake Dick, a particularly unsavory character, and three other crooks. For months they had been causing trouble along all the trails in the area. Then, in early April, the gang held up the stage for Nevada City soon after it left Illinoistown, a supply point known today as Colfax. They took $7,000 from the strong box then turned to the two passengers. The man gave up his $230 without a fight but the woman swore she had no money. The gang searched her even though she put up a fierce struggle and they found $300 in gold stuffed in her stockings.

The holdups continued for about a year until a sheriff’s posse killed three members of the gang, but Williams and Rattlesnake Dick escaped and headed south. The next year Dick was knifed to death by another road agent at Spanish Dry Diggings along the middle fork of the American River. But Williams disappeared until the 1860s when he showed up in the rough and tumble boomtown of Virginia City, Nevada where a competing hooligan wielding a shotgun fired through a saloon window and killed him. "Stand and Deliver"

Reelfoot: From the Chickasaw word Kalopin, meaning deformed foot or......Reelfoot.

Rattlesnake Dick Barter was born in Canada and came to California during the Gold Rush. Disdaining hard work he soon turned to thieving and is buried in the Fulweller Cemetery, on Nevada Street, in Auburn, CA. An alternative fact.....Placer County claims that Rattlesnake Dick was killed in a shoot-out, (aka - ambush) by the County Sheriff at Forest Hill near the present Raleys store. Ed.
Dueling Frenchmen

The history of the French arrival, settling and influence on the California Gold Rush in an area known as the Northern Mines, reveals many intrepid individuals and companies who strived to search for gold, build waterways, construct towns and progress as a civilized society in the wilderness. As with any society, there were occasional individuals who skirted the rules and boundaries of accepted behavior.

Such is the following story from the history of Malakoff Diggins Ed.

September 26, 1866

Two Frenchmen, residing at North Bloomfield fought a duel near that place Sunday last. Dispute arose between Souchett and Picard in relation to an account of $14.00, which the former claimed to have against the latter.

Challenge was accepted. Preliminaries arranged, weapons chosen, Colt six shooters. Principals and Seconds repaired to the field, the latter, desiring to prevent effusion of blood, capped weapons. Loaded them with ball, no powder.

Principals stationed. Discovered trick of seconds. Determined to fight without Seconds. Pistols loaded and parties repaired to field alone.

At 25 paces fight began, parties firing rapidly and advancing. One fired six shots, the other five, the cap snapping in one case.

Souchett advanced upon his antagonist and beat him over the head until he was nearly dead. Save this, neither injured by shooting. Picard almost insensible from being whipped.

September 27, 1866

Souchett and Picard, arrested. Taken before Justice Carter on Tuesday. Tried upon two charges: “Unlawfully assembled together by previous agreement and fighting to the great terror of the citizens of the town of North Bloomfield and to the great terror to the citizens of this state, with pistols loaded with powder and leaden bullets, the place where they were assembled being a public place.”

Sentenced to county jail, Picard got 20 days, Souchett 21 days.

From: Nevada County Gold
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The Friends of North Bloomfield & Malakoff Diggins (FNB&MD) is a non-profit organization assisting the California Department of Parks and Recreation in the operation of Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park. Your tax deductible membership in FNB & MD will

- help preserve, protect and enhance the man made and natural resources of Malakoff Diggins SHP
- support interpretation of the park’s rich biological diversity, geologic features, historic and cultural resources
- provide you with a quarterly newsletter and other notices of Park activities
- include a 10% discount on purchases from the Malakoff Park Store.

Membership Levels

Annual Individual membership ($20) □
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I am interested in:
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Send payment with membership application to
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Mission:
We enhance the interpretive experience for visitors, promote park-based education for learners of all ages, and support and preserve the natural and cultural resources of Malakoff Diggins SHP. We also assist other cooperative associations and the State Park System mission for the benefit of the public.

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