Friends, readers and all who revere, the Malakoff: For what is only a hic-up in time, it has been an enjoyment to prepare the 20 Issues of the Humbug Herald newsletter the past 5 yrs.

For a relatively remote and often mis-understood state park, the amount of history, lore, anecdotes and hidden truths relative to the idyllic wonder of the place, have been an honor for me to probe and interpret through the pages and photos of this sometimes replica of a Gold Rush newspaper.

“State Historic Park” conjures up images of cannon balls, forts and old wagons, to many, but the real history is of a human vein with a mother lode of stories, letters and legends to be mined and shared through the old fashioned printed word.

Thus, like a Gold Rush Boom Town, this periodical of its time becomes irrelevant, succumbing to progress and consolidation.

To those who actually read the words and commented upon the content, I thank you for the opportunity to share the finds, and trust you occasioned a sudden chuckle or “Eureka” moment of discovery within the pages.

The endeavor has been enjoyable, and personally rewarding, with challenges of accuracy, facts vs. fiction, while attempting to strike the truth from, conflicting histories, which have often been corrupted by the dreaded, “Revised” versions, for better or for worse.

Tommy-Knockers remind us of the old saw, “when the truth becomes legend, print the legend”...........sometimes.

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Christmas likely was not very exciting. The following offering from Twain must suffice:

Only meadows and forests are visible — not a living creature, not a house, no stick or stone or remnant of a ruin, and not a sound, not even a whisper to disturb the Sabbath stillness — you will find it hard to believe that there stood at one time a fiercely-flourishing little city, of two thousand or three thousand souls, with its newspaper, fire company, brass band, volunteer militia, bank, hotels, noisy Fourth of July processions and speeches, gambling halls crammed with tobacco smoke, profanity, and rough-bearded men of all nations and colors, with tables heaped with gold dust sufficient for the revenues of a German principality— and now nothing is left of it all but a lifeless, homeless solitude. The men are gone, the houses have vanished, even the name of the place is forgotten.

And where are they now? Scattered to the ends of the earth — or prematurely aged and decrepit — or shot or stabbed in street affrays — or dead of disappointed hopes and broken hearts — all gone, or nearly all.

It was a splendid population — for all the slow, sleepy, sluggish-brained sloths staid at home; nothing juvenile, nothing feminine visible anywhere!

In those days miners would flock in crowds to catch a glimpse of that rare and blessed spectacle, a woman! Old inhabitants tell how, in a certain camp, the news went abroad early in the morning that a woman was come! Everybody went down there, and a shout went up when an actual, bona fide dress was discovered fluttering in the wind! The male emigrant was visible. The miners said: “Fetch her out!”

He said: “It is my wife, gentlemen — she is sick — we have been robbed of money, provisions, everything — we want to rest.”

“Fetch her out! We’ve got to see her!”

“But, gentlemen, the poor thing, she —”

“FETCH HER OUT”

He “fetched her out,” and they swung their hats and sent up three rousing cheers; and they crowded around and gazed at her, and touched her dress, and listened to her voice with the look of men who listened to a memory rather than a present reality — and they collected twenty-five hundred dollars in gold and gave it to the man, and swung their hats again and gave three more cheers, and went home satisfied.

*Christmas Cheer and Charity in the Gold Rush Wilderness*. Ed./LC
Christmas in Rich Bar 1851

The Saturnalia commenced on Christmas evening, at the Humboldt [Saloon], which, on that very day, had passed into the hands of new proprietors. The most gorgeous preparations were made for celebrating the two events. The bar was trimmed with red calico, the bowling-alley had a new lining of the coarsest and whitest cotton cloth, and the broken lamp-shades were replaced by whole ones.

All day long, patient mules could be seen descending the hill, bending beneath casks of brandy and baskets of champagne, and, for the first time in the history of that celebrated building, the floor (wonderful to relate, it has a floor) was washed .... At nine o'clock in the evening they had an oyster-and-champagne supper in the Humboldt, which was very gay with toasts, songs, speeches, etc. I believe that the company danced all night. At any rate, they were dancing when I went to sleep, and they were dancing when I woke the next morning. The revel was kept up in this mad way for three days, growing wilder every hour.

From the letters of Amelia Knapp Smith Clappe, better known as: Dame Shirley

Such reports filtering back to Philadelphia or Boston, must have re-enforced the concept of a godless collection of sinners populating the gold fields.

Saturnalia, an ancient Roman festival held in honor of the god Saturn, was introduced around 217 BC to raise citizen morale after a crushing military defeat at the hands of the Carthaginians, evolved into a week long period of lawlessness, drunkenness, and debauchery between December 21 and 25. (1)

Christian leaders later tried to convert large numbers of pagans by promising them that they could continue to celebrate Saturnalia as Christians. The problem was there was nothing Christian about Saturnalia.

To remedy this, Christians named Saturnalia’s concluding day, December 25, to be Jesus’ birthday. (2) In return for this observance, the Church was tacitly perpetuating the Pagan celebrations. (3) Legitimized, Saturnalia endured and was practiced to various degrees in various places down through the centuries.

Many men and a few women, fretting to survive on the edge of frustration and despair in the California gold fields, would be tempted to throw “civilized” behavior to the winds and embrace the pleasures of unbridled Pagan conduct on Christmas Eve.

Today, Saturnalia is mostly remembered with costume parties or whimsical Holiday Cards and perhaps eternally, by ribald college fraternities.

editor

(1) Wikipedia
(2) Rabbi Lawrence Kushner
(3) Prof. Stephen Niessenbaum

Google Images
Like the Last Picture Show, the South Yuba River Park Association celebrated the end of an era after 25 years of service to South Yuba River State Park. President Robert Coats emphasized, a new era has begun with SYRPA joining Empire Mine SHP and Malakoff Diggins SHP as parts of the new Sierra Gold Parks Foundation which will collectively serve the three parks as a non-profit Cooperating Association.

The future of the State Park Volunteers for each state park unit will remain unchanged with business as usual in their interpretive endeavors.

On Tuesday, December 3rd, about 60+ folks gathered for a Christmas Pot Luck and transition celebration. Speeches, toasts and awards accompanied some fine food and dessert, with references to the history of SYRPA over the years, from 1994 to now.

Notice was paid to the heroic efforts of the Save Our Bridge movement to ensure the renovation of the Covered Bridge, an extraordinary accomplishment.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year one and all.
“DECK US ALL WITH BOSTON CHARLIE”

Deck us all with Boston Charlie,
Walla walla, Wash., an’ Kalamazoo!
Nora’s freezin’ on the trolley,
Swaller dollar cauliflower alley’garoo!

Don’t we know archaic barrel,
Lullaby lilla boy, Louisville Lou?
Trolley Molly don’t love Harold,
Boola boola Pensacoolah hullabaloo!

Bark us all bow-wows of folly,
Polly wolly cracker n’ too-da-loo!
Donkey Bonny brays a carol,
Antelope Cantaloup, ’lope with you!

Hunky Dory’s pop is lolly gaggin’ on the wagon,
Willy, folly go through!
Chollie’s collie barks at Barrow,
Harum scarum five alarum bung-a-boo!

Duck us all in bowls of barley,
Hinky dinky dink an’ polly voo!
Chilly Filly’s name is Chollie,
Chollie Filly’s jolly chilly view halloo!

Bark us all bow-wows of folly,
Double-bubble, toyland trouble! Woof, Woof, Woof!
Tizzy seas on melon collie!
Dibble-dabble, scribble-scrabble! Goof, Goof, Goof!

Deck us all with Boston Charlie,
Walla walla, Wash., and Kalamazoo!
Nora’s freezin’ on the trolley,
Swaller dollar cauliflower Alleygarrow!

Don’t we know archaic barrel,
Lullaby Lilla boy, Louisville Lou.
Trolley Molly don’t love Harold,
Boola boola Pensacoolah hullabaloo!