

THE TRINIDAD EXCITEMENT OF 1850.  
A REASONABLE REMINISCENCE.

MORE far-reaching in its effects, more extended in length of time, and affecting a far greater number of people than even the Gold Lake craze, was the Trinidad excitement and the rush for the Trinity mines early in the year 1850. The crude ideas and extravagant expectations of those days led to many a wild goose chase, and none of them was wilder than the search for Trinidad Bay, where was to be founded a rival to San Francisco and an entrepot to the northern mines.

The gold discoveries in 1848 and 1849 were chiefly confined to the western slope of the Sierra, and hundreds crossed the northern mountains and passed the great white Shasta, with no idea that in its very shadow the precious metal could be found, and in the mountains where it stood a king were stored riches in keeping with its regal splendor. Klamath, Scott, Shasta, Salmon and Trinity rivers, with their gold-laden confluents, were passed by with scarcely a thought, while the emigrant hastened onward to the center of attraction. Yet Northern California was not even then an entirely unknown region. The trappers of the Hudson's Bay Company had visited every stream and set their traps along the banks for nearly twenty years. To the great mass of Argonauts, however, it was an unexplored wild. No map had been made of it and no published information was to be had. The knowledge of the trappers, who were scattered far and wide, availed but little to clear up the mystery of mountains and streams, and but little thought was bestowed upon them. Fremont had marked the Klamath River on his map, but had located it many miles north of its proper course. Beyond this all was blank. Added to this was the general belief that gold was only to be found on the western slope of the Sierra. Why, then, should the prospector turn his thoughts or his steps toward the northwest?

Major Pearson B. Reading, the old trapper and pioneer Californian, left Sutter's Fort in the spring of 1845 on a trapping expedition to the upper rivers, and in May crossed the ridge and came upon a large stream which he then christened Trinity River, supposing that it had its outlet in Trinidad Bay, as marked on the old Spanish charts. This bay had been discovered on the 11th of June, 1775, by an exploring expedition, consisting of a frigate, commanded by Bruno Haceta, and a sloop, by Juan de la Quadra y Bodega. This was the Sunday of the Holy Trinity, and the devout Spaniards named the bay Trinidad. This could not have been the present Humboldt Bay, for though the bay now called Trinidad is little more than an open roadstead, and lies but a few miles to the north of the other and better harbor, its outline was too plainly marked on the chart to admit of mistake. As early as March, 1848, a call was made in San Francisco for a public meeting to take steps for finding and exploring this old Spanish discovery, to see what kind of a harbor it presented, and what was the character of the country tributary to it; but the announcement of the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill put an end

to the project for a time. Trinidad was forgotten and all California hastened to the mines.

In the summer of 1849 Major Reading started with a party of men from Fort Reading to prospect the Trinity. They returned in August and reported the discovery of very rich diggings on that stream. The effect of such a statement as this can well be imagined. Emigrants were then coming down from Oregon or entering the upper Sacramento Valley by the Lassen trail from across the plains, and while most of these preferred to continue on to the well-known mines farther south, a few were venturesome enough to cross the high mountains to Trinity River. In this way quite a number of miners gathered and worked along the banks of the Trinity in the fall of 1849. The reports of rich diggings sent out by these men created quite a fever of excitement, but the fear of the rigors of a winter in unknown mountains, cut off by snow-bound ridges from food and supplies, deterred the crowd from venturing into this wilderness until spring; and, indeed, all but a few of those who worked on the stream in the fall went back to the valley as winter set in for the same reason.

Hundreds gathered at the head of the Sacramento Valley to await the opening up of the mountain passes by the warm spring weather, while all through the mines were working men who had determined to abandon their claims and hasten to Trinity River at the earliest possible moment. The error made by Major Reading in supposing the Trinity to flow into Trinidad Bay was communicated to others, and this was the general opinion of all. It was then conceived that the best way to reach the mines was to go to Trinidad Bay and then follow up the course of the stream. All that was known of the bay was contained in the records of the Spanish explorers and the later observations of Captain Vancouver, while such a place was indicated on the maps at an indefinite point on the northern coast. To find Trinidad Bay became, then, the all-important object. In the month of November, 1849, two parties left the Trinity mines to find the desired harbor. One of these proceeded to San Francisco and commenced fitting out a sea expedition.

The second party, consisting of Josiah Gregg, L. K. Wood, D. A. Buck, Van Dusen, J. B. Truesdell, C. C. Southard, Isaac Wilson and T. Sebing, followed down the stream to find its mouth. When they came to the Bald Hills they crossed the summit to the coast, thus failing to discover the fact that the Trinity was but an affluent of the Klamath. They reached the coast at the mouth of Mad River, which then received its name because Gregg flew into a passion there when some of the party desired to abandon the search and not go up the coast to examine a bay, of the existence of which they had learned from the Indians. Gregg's passion prevailed; they followed up the coast and came upon a bay which they called the Trinidad, and is the one so known at the present day. Near the head of the bay they left an inscription on a tree as evidence of their presence. They then traveled south inland and soon came upon a stream which they named Eel River, continuing up its banks and crossing