

Romance of Old West Lingers in Jacksonville

(Compiled by Oregon Travel Bureau)
Romance of the Old West lingers in the foothills of southern Oregon where Jacksonville, queen city of Oregon's golden yesterdays, sits in the sun remembering days that used to be and at the same time taking an active part in the world of today.

The scene of the major gold rush in the Beaver State in 1851, attracting thousands of miners to gold-filled claims, Jacksonville was a pioneer metropolis which made Oregon history nearly a century ago.

It all began when James Clugage and J. R. Poole, traveling through the Rogue River valley, did some casual prospecting in what is now known as Rich Gulch. There they struck gold nuggets and dust. It was not long until the secret of the gulch became known and miners converged on the area where "anyone could wash out a pint cup of gold a day."

By February 1852 every foot of the gulch was staked out in claims and by March surrounding hills and gulches became hosts to ever-increasing numbers of miners. All of this was in the face of hostile Indians. In February the first trading post was opened in a tent by Appler and Kenny, packers from Yreka, Calif., over the Siskiyou mountains.

It was hardly a bazaar. The stock boasted of only a few tools, some iron, roughest of rough clothing and boots, "black strap" tobacco and a liberal supply of whiskey. Historians say the latter was probably worse than the poorest moonshine during prohibition days. There were also small quantities of flour, salt and limited staples.

The first log cabin came in March, with finishing lumber whip-sawed in the canyon at a cost of \$250 per thousand. From

there on the town boomed and boomed and problems grew.

Gamblers, courtisans and sharpers of every kind, like a blight, flocked to the new El Dorado. Saloons multiplied beyond necessity; monte and faro games were in full blast. Strains of music lured the "honest miner" and led his feet into dangerous places, where he and his treasure were soon parted.

There was no written law in the gold rush town. But there was a law higher, stronger and more effective than written codes — the stern necessity of mutual protection, with the courage and will to enforce it.

In 1852 the first people's court was in action. A miner named Potts was shot down by a gambler named Brown. Immediately every claim was vacated and miners set up court to mete out justice to Brown. The case was tried on the merits of right and wrong without legal technicalities. Brown was found guilty, taken to an oak grove near the present Presbyterian church, and hanged. There he was buried.

The winter of 1852-53 brought severe weather. Snow blocked travel to and from the gold camp as early as November. Flour at once rose to a dollar per pound and the supply was soon exhausted. Tobacco brought a dollar an ounce but salt was priceless; worth more than its weight in gold.

Other troubles became more imminent. Indian resentment against encroaching whites grew steadily. In 1853 they determined on a deadly war, which in its beginnings took the lives of settlers living at some distance from Jacksonville. Pickets were thrown about the town nightly but even then a citizen was killed within rifle range of the business district.

When trouble reached a climax and concerted attack on the town was expected, women and children were sheltered in Jacksonville's only brick building, then one of the first in the state. Time, as time will, eventually brought peace to the Rogue River valley.

In the peaceful cemetery on

the hill among the laurels, here and there tombstones carry the line, "killed by Indians," recalling sanguine happenings of long ago.

Even as production from the gold claims lagged, Jacksonville continued to grow. After gold mines passed their heyday,

Jacksonville became a business center for a wide area and seemingly destined for greater things in southern Oregon progress. However, when the railroad came in 1884 it went directly across the valley, by-

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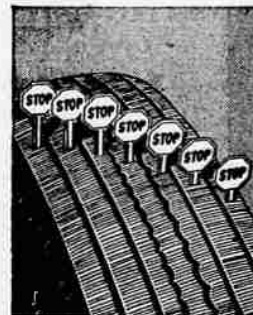
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