

FAMOUS MINING STRIKES

By THOMAS E. STEWARD

The Comstock Lode

WHEN John C. Fremont, afterwards the first candidate for president of the youthful Republican party, passed overland through the Sierras to California his guide was the redoubtable Kit Carson. Carson was one of the most famous of all the old frontiersmen, and it was in his honor that the Carson valley of Nevada was named. In this valley soon after Fremont's trip there came to light one of the richest strikes of mineral treasure the world has ever known. It was the famous Comstock lode, which produced millions in wealth and established the fortune of many families still prominent.

Fremont made his trip in 1844. It was five years later, in 1849, that the great rush to California's newly discovered gold fields began, and it was the pull of the California gold that caused the first discoverer of the great Carson valley treasure to leave it for what he hoped would be better in the Golden state. This man was William Frouse, a young Mormon, who stopped in the Carson valley on his way West. He used a milk pan to wash out what looked like promising "pay dirt," and the results were far from discouraging. But he gave up the reality for hopes of richer strikes farther on. Yet news of this strike spread. Next year a party of Mexicans put in an appearance and spent several months washing gold until their supplies gave out.

By then the place had been named Gold canyon, but there was no realization that it was to reveal an almost incredible wealth, partly in gold, but chiefly in silver.

One day a miner by the name of James Finney uncovered a more profitable claim than usual. Soon after a wandering Canadian by the name of Henry Comstock took a claim near Finney's.

In May, 1859, Patrick O'Loughlin and Peter O'Riley staked a claim near those of Finney and Comstock and immediately realized that they had made their fortunes. A black and crumbly kind of ore with which neither of them was familiar crumbled into gold in their hands and their crude rocker-type washers showed heavy deposits of precious metal after every load had been washed. They had made the big strike. But no sooner had they gone to work in dead earnest than Comstock reappeared and on the flimsiest basis demanded a share in their claim on a technicality having to do with the claim he had staked out. This they granted. In this way it came about that Comstock's name went down into history as that of the famous Comstock lode, though he did not discover it and was left into the final strike on a basis that looked extremely flimsy, more because the discoverers feared to lose all of such a rich claim and yielded without argument.

When the crumbly black gold was taken to San Francisco for a scientific analysis it was proved to have a yield of \$3,000 a ton of ore in silver and \$276 in gold, something never matched elsewhere. All who staked claims along the famous lode became wealthy in big-time except those who sold out at relatively low prices to pocket a quick profit.

The Gold of Japan

UP TO relatively modern days gold was a rarity in Japan. Considerable supplies were obtained from river gravels, and some from quartz deposits that were crushed and panned out in the way placer gold would be washed from sand, but the country's needs for monetary purposes and for royalty made it necessary to restrict the use of gold by private persons.

The old-fashioned mining operations in Japan were paid for in a remarkable manner. Laborers employed to wash the gravel did not receive any pay at all, on the theory that enough gold would adhere to their clothes to repay them for their effort. And seemingly this was true. At any rate the mining continued and the lack of payment persisted for many, many years.

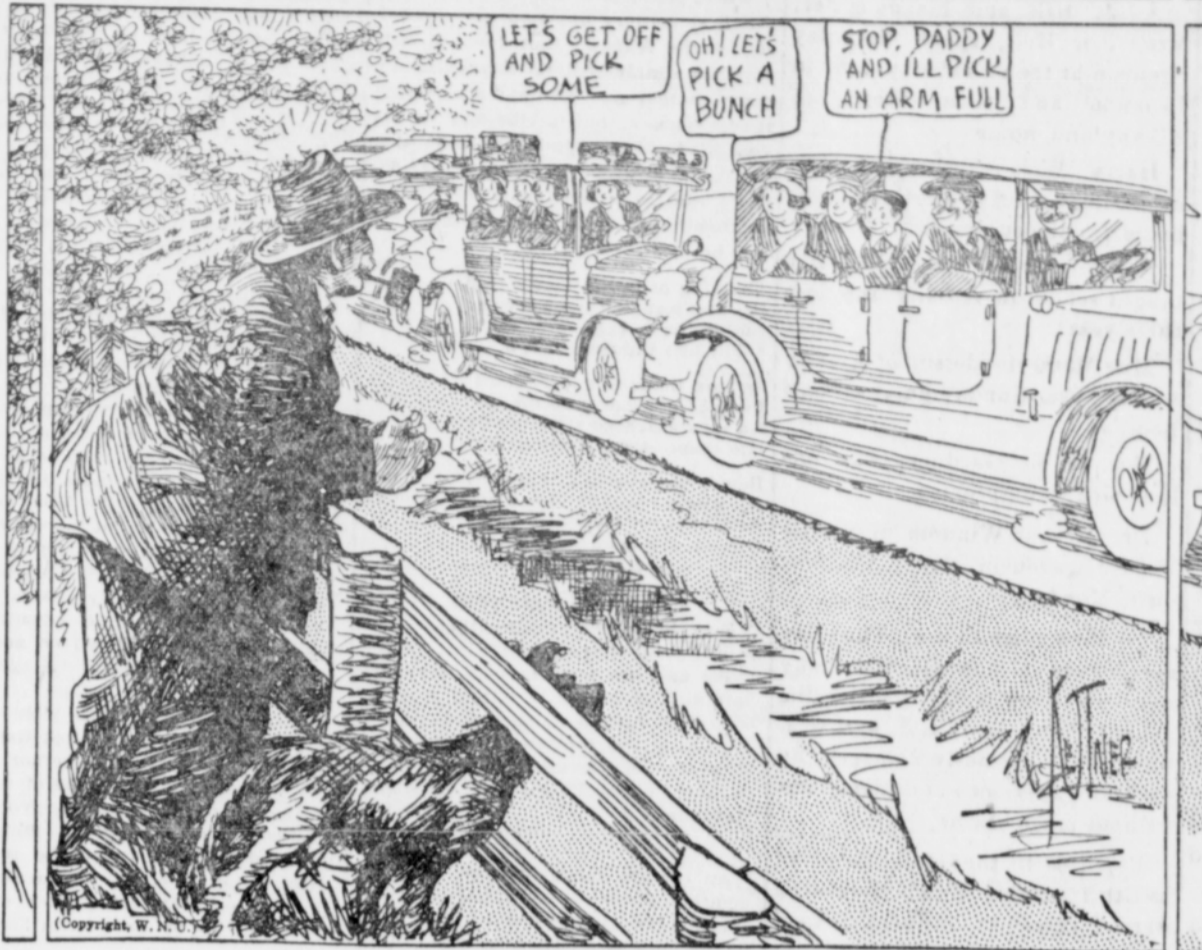
In the early days after the opening of Japan to westerners there was a belief that tremendous amounts of gold were to be found in that land. This fallacy had its roots in the fact that in Japan there were many "golden" ornaments in temples and palaces which were not, however, true gold, but copper covered with gold by an extremely clever process originated by the Japanese and still in use in that country.

The Japanese "plating" process was really one of amalgamation rather than of actual plating as it is done today. The copper base was heated after having been immersed in plum vinegar to clean it thoroughly. When the copper was still hot, mercury was placed on it, forming an amalgamated surface. Gold leaf was then placed over the mercury, and the whole object heated to a still higher point to get rid of the mercury. The gold then remained in a rather thorough mixture with the surface of the copper. Plating of this kind is said to have been extremely durable. Many statues so coated hundreds of years ago are still in about as good condition as when they were new.

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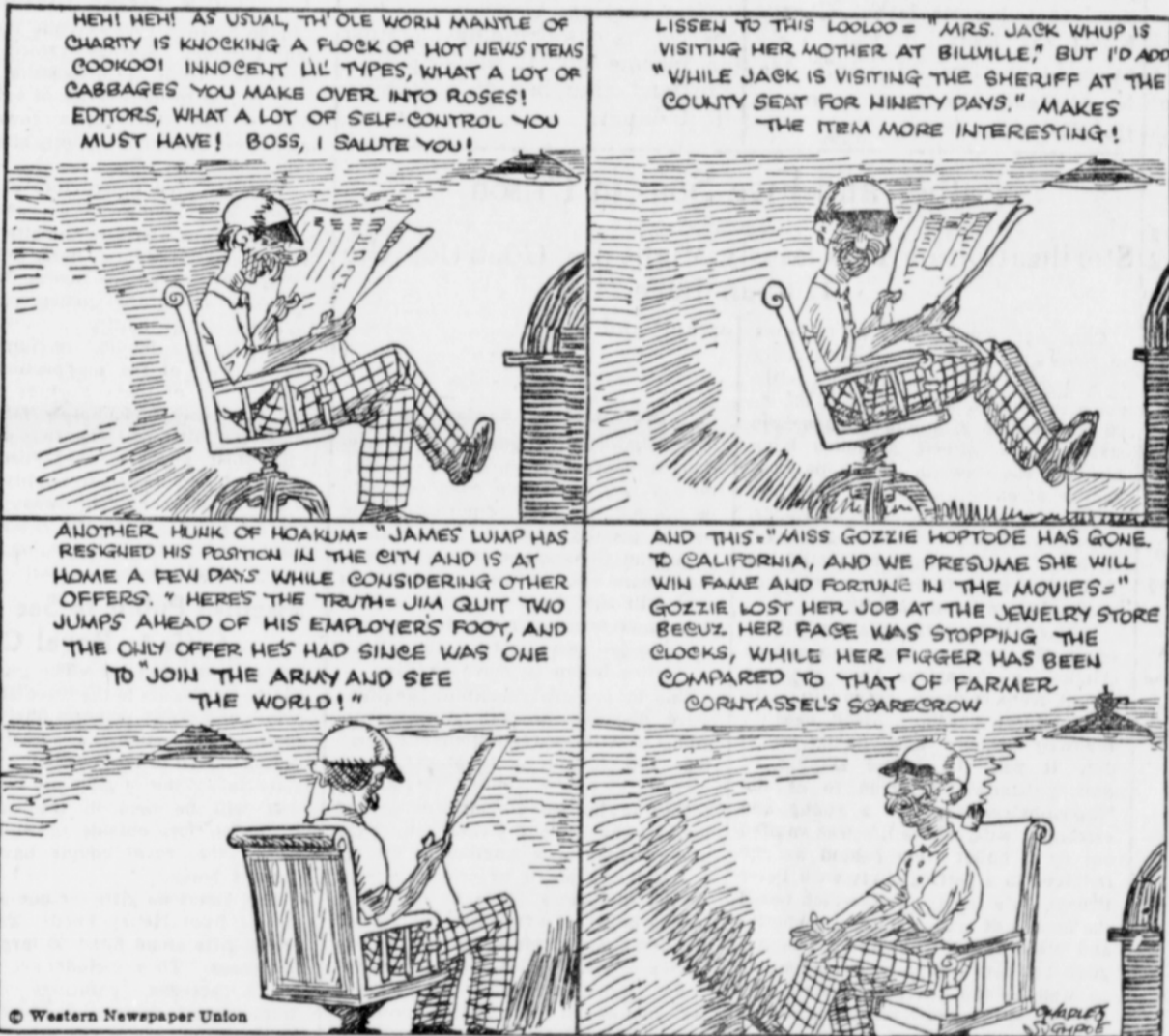
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