DESCRIPTION OF ESMEERALDA (AURORA) DISTRICT, NEVADA.


The account of Esmeralda begins on page 43:

EARLY HISTORY OF ESMEERALDA.

First Discovery.

"Comrades", shouted suddenly one of the young knaves on the window seat, "la Esmeralda!" ... "But I wish Satan would scourge me if I know what they mean with this word Esmeralda! What is the word—is it Egyptian?"

One year subsequent to the Bodie discovery, Jas. M. Braly, J. M. Cory, and E. R. Hicks extended explorations a few miles further east. In the summer of 1860, Braly and Cory (from the Santa Clara Valley), after glancing at the surface cropings and workings on the Comstock, proceeded to the Mono country; from thence, accompanied by Hicks (a part Cherokee Indian), they made a detour eastward toward Walker Lake, swinging round south and west to the immediate neighborhood of the mines in question. South of Walker Lake, there is a prominent mountain bearing Cory's name. It has been related that Hicks brought into camp the first specimen of Esmeralda quartz, picked up while hunting rabbits. Mr. Braly, in a letter dated at San Jose, April 23d, gives the following version, which puts the whole matter in a nutshell:

"We camped near the race track (a grassy flat at the head of Willow Gulch), Aug. 21, 1860, late in the evening having left Cory's Peak that morning. Next morning (Aug. 22, we moved camp to near where the brewery now stands (a secluded spot at the head of Esmeralda Gulch); finding good grass and water, we stopped for the purpose of resting a day or two. After turning our animals loose, I went over the hill across the main Esmeralda lode, and found the first silver ore discovered, on the Winnemucca lode, at a point where we subsequently set the center stake of our claim on that lode. The next ore was found by Mr. Cory, the same afternoon, near the south end of the cropings on the Esmeralda lode. This we considered the most important prospect for a mine, after finding ore in some veins of minor importance. We posted notices of location on four claims, the 25th of August: the Esmeralda, Winnemucca, Cape and La Plata. We then went to Monoville for supplies and returned about the last of the month, about fifteen men accompanying us, when we organized the district, adopted mining laws and elected a Recorder. 'Then the trouble commenced!'"
First Records.

"At a meeting of the miners of Esmeralda district, held at Braly, Cory and Hicks' camp, Aug. 30, 1860, Dr. E. F. Mitchell was chosen President, and Jas. M. Braly Secretary," and a code of laws containing twenty sections (including a resolution to have the proceedings published in the Territorial Enterprise, Virginia), adopted, beginning as follows:

Section I.—This district shall be called Esmeralda district, and shall be bounded as follows: A line commencing at a point five miles north of the discovery claim on the Esmeralda lode, running east five miles; thence north ten miles; thence west ten miles; thence south ten miles; thence five miles to the place of beginning.

(Note: The starting point given above must have been south instead of north of Esmeralda discovery, else it would result in district bounds excluding most of the mining ground. J.H.F.)

Then follows a description of the first location (the Esmeralda, made five days previous), with the names of Josiah Belden, Dr. Benj. Cory, J. C. Braly and Dr. G. Moncton, in addition to those of the discoverers. The Real del Monte claim on Last Chance Hill, was located Aug. 31, by J. E. Clayton, L. McKinstry and A. D. Allen. By Oct. 25, 357 claims were recorded. Mr. Braly (the first Recorder) realized handsomely from the office.*

---

*It is proper to add that the discoverers of Esmeralda district were not so unfortunate as such men generally are—Braly and Cory returning to Santa Clara county, Cal., Cal., with over $30,000 each, and being prudent men, realized on that again. Hicks started for Arkansas with over $10,000, but it is not known whether he benefitted farther; in short he has never been heard of since. Probably the most melancholy fate of any successful operator in Aurora, was that of Alex. Gamble (of San Francisco), who became a millionaire out of del Monte and other operations, but who is now perhaps worse than bankrupt—seemingly broken spirited. He was once principal of a leading college in Maine, but the school kept there was tame enough as compared with his more recent inculcations on Last Chance Hill.

(Page 45.)

A town called Esmeralda was staked off at the original camp (the brewery site), but the drift of discovery north soon resulted in centering the population at the junction of the three ravines created by Silver, Middle and Last Chance Hills, where Aurora grew into prominence. The name of "Esmeralda" was a pet one with Mr. Cory, and was obtained from Victor Hugo's novel, entitled "The Hunchback of Notre Dame," in chapter 6 of which the gipsy dancing girl (the heroine) is brought upon the scene. The Esmeralda excitement was a wild dance of death or disappointment to thousands; any piece
of paper having the word printed on it commanding high figures for a year or two, and being as valueless, comparatively, as Confederate scrip by the spring of 1865. In the first constitutional convention of Nevada, a member from Esmeralda insisted upon naming "the battle born State," after that of his favorite county.

Progress of Affairs.

Although exceedingly rich prospects were obtained on a score of claims, and work of an unsystematic character was performed on hundreds, no particular excitement was created until the fall and winter of '62-3, when the Wide West bonanza was discovered. The first mill, however, was erected in the spring of '61 by Edmond Green. It was located in the ravine, just below the rich claims on Last Chance Hill. Mr. G. was Superintendent of the Wide West, and speaks of the ore chamber as wide enough to "turn a wagon and horses in." The ore chutes of the Wide West, Johnson, Chihuahua, Pond, and del Monte, covering an extent of ground over 1200 feet in length, were all of a character as to richness and size, and out of them the bulk of the bullion was produced. A dozen other claims contributed more or less to the total bullion production, as the Utah, Ural, Garibaldi, Young America, Live Yankee, Empire, etc. Middle Hill, next south, was comparatively untouched, though evidently the most solid formation for deep exploration in the district. Silver Hill, the most southern point of interest, is about as much broken up on the surface as Last Chance, yet much work, after a kind, was performed; the Antelope claim producing a great deal of bullion. (Page 45) Mining those days on the part of every one, as a rule, consisted of exhausting the surface deposits, regardless of what might be below a certain level. The Esmeralda people appeared to be a sort of lost tribe, considering the rich ore as manna fallen from above, and after "gobbling everything in sight," getting "out of the wilderness" as soon as possible. By the spring of 1864, no less than seventeen quartz mills were erected in the district, ten of them being in operation; the Wide West, new del Monte, and Antelope mills costing in all more than half a million dollars. Excepting the last named, and two small affairs, all of those seventeen structures, many of which were costly, are missing; the machinery being carried off to other districts. In 1865, the Union mill in Aurora was torn to pieces simply for the purpose of securing the large quantity of rich amalgam wasted around the battery and pans, so reckless and extravagant had things been carried on in early days. Doubtless several millions of dollars floated off down the creek toward East Walker river. Rock that would not mill at least $75 per ton, was cast aside, and no doubt many thousand tons of ore that would pay well today, lie around loose yet, though the crevice miners, the "coasters," have culled things pretty closely.
Description of Esmeralda.
"Bodie and Esmeralda"
(Page 45, cont'd)

For several years subsequent to the great excitement, the old rich chambers constituted a sort of empty sugar barrel, out of which, like street boys, they obtained many a sweet toothful. John Neidy, present district recorder, a man of good judgement, was a large operator in this way, realizing in the course of three or four years, over $75,000. This coyote work has left most of the old shafts, drifts and tunnels, such as they were, in a state of confusion worse confused. They were started everywhere and have ended nowhere.

**Total Bullion Product.**

It has been the most vexatious and difficult matter to get a satisfactory statement of the products of the Esmeralda mines, first and last, and as yet only an approximate estimate can be given. Much was stolen or carried off, of which no definite account ever can be given. Direct inquiry at Wells Fargo & Co.'s office in San Francisco elicited the information that all records of the kind were destroyed prior to 1870. In reply to a letter on this subject, J. S. Jameson, presiding judge of the District Court of Esmeralda County, and who was formerly in the express office at Aurora, says (Aurora, May 5):

"I was in the office over five years, and made all the reports, but I have forgotten the exact figures. I have no recollection of the amount sent by each company respectively. My recollection is, however, that in the year 1864, between $7,000,000 and $8,000,000 were forwarded from the office here, and that about $12,000,000 altogether was sent away prior to the year 1869."

The assay office of Krouse & Reese, at Aurora, according to the best recollection of Mr. Reese, who resides in San Francisco, handled about half a million per month for a period of about eighteen months in succession. (His old books are still in existence, but at present inaccessible.) These are perfectly trustworthy accounts so far as they go, but will not have the weight that exact figures, dates, etc., would. In answer to a letter written to J. M. Dormer, editor of the Herald, at Aurora, requesting him to search the records there, he says (under date of April 30):

"I enclose you the following table compiled from the books of the old express company. I think it contains only such gold bullion and dust as was shipped by Wells, Fargo & Co., without insurance, for the receipt book is not to be found here, and this table only appears to cover part of the bullion product of the camp. In the same books from which this summary was taken, I find 50,000 lbs. of bullion with no marked value, the weight is all that is given.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Bullion Shipped</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>$43,417.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>173,148.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>546,019.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>952,023.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>237,185.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>158,162.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>130,656.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Description of Esmeralda.
"Bodie and Esmeralda".
(Page 47, cont'd)

-5-

Shipped in 1868........... $98,188.38
" 1869........... 27,116.50
Total $125,904.88

(Page 48)

For the present, these figures must suffice for
correct data. When Mr. Reese gets at his books again,some-
ting more definite will be obtained, so far as a single
assay office was concerned; there being others engaged in the
business at Aurora during the period in question.

Cause of the Decline.

On this head, Judge Jameson also writes:
"My idea of the cause of the decline of the dis-
trict, and I believe the generally received opinion is, that
just at the time (1864-5) the rich surface deposits became
exhausted there was a great and general decline in all min-
ing shares, and this, together with a great amount of litiga-
tion in regard to conflicting titles, caused stockholders in
the various companies to refuse to pay or furnish the money
necessary to prospect the mines to any great depth below where
the surface deposits had given out."

In other words, the surface deposits on the Comstock
were exhausted, the shares dropping in value after the manner
of the Wide West and del Monte, which were at one time selling
at $500 and upwards. (The law suits between the Wide West and
Johnson claimants; the del Monte and Pond; the Antelope and
Young America, etc., forming a history of themselves. It cost
the del Monte about half a million for lawyers and shot-gun
men. The labor performed on Last Chance Hill today presents
much the appearance of a military redoubt, or series of in-
trenchments, where hand to hand fighting took place.) It be-
came a question with the late W.C. Ralston, the boldest of
operators, of abandoning either the Comstock or Esmeralda
mines. It was decided, at last, to sink deep under Mt. David-
son, and Mt. Braly, with its surrounding treasure hills, was
left a solitary sentinel, as it were, over the most interesting
ruins in the history of mining. Ralston, however, never gave up
the idea of thoroughly prospecting Esmeralda district, and
especially Last Chance Hill, and to that end started up the
old Juniata works at the extreme eastern base of Humboldt and
Martinez Hills; first in 1872, and again in 1874. But this
work was of a fitful character, not in a favorable locality,
and on the occasion of his death was entirely stopped. The
Bank of California fell heir to all of the leading mills and
mines, and out of this it may yet regain its former prestige.

(The next is a crude but intelligible map of the
district, showing Aurora townsite, the main gulches,
and hills, and the general appearance of the vein
system.)
The Aurora of To-Day.

The Old and the New.

The town-site is high (3,000 feet), Mt. Braly in the background (10,000 feet); the climate healthful. At one time Aurora had a population estimated at from six to ten thousand, containing many substantial and presentable brick buildings. About a dozen of the latter yet remain, and being in particular demand. (Buildings that were sold for taxes one year ago, now being valued at from $10,000 to $12,000 apiece.) After fourteen years of neglect, the locusts are returning with a view of remaining indefinitely. So much depends upon the working of the new del Monte, however, that speculation on that point is useless. Hundreds of wooden buildings were consumed as common fuel, a very few of the first and most worthless yet standing, affording a curious mixture altogether. "Mark Twain's cabin" is becoming somewhat mythical; the stories about him, however, grow apace. Incidents of the blood and thunder order, enough to fill a volume, could be related of early days, before and after the State line was established, when criminals had a roving commission.

September 16, '63, Aurora was found to be upwards of three miles inside the State (or Territory) of Nevada, instead of in California, as previously supposed. Notwithstanding, a duel was fought in October following, the attempts of the respective Sheriffs of Esmeralda and Mono Counties to prevent, practically seconding it. The editor of the Times was duly wounded and honor was satisfied. Those were war times locally and generally. The pioneer journal—the Esmeralda Star—was first issued on brown wrapping paper (May 7, 1862), no one caring to father its high-sounding political platitudes, there being no name at its head as editor or proprietor. Evidently, a "court-house clique" existed at Aurora then, as there probably has since. For ten years the county seat, Post and express offices, two or three stores and as many saloons, constituted (as Tyn dall might say) the protoplasmic "power and potency of every form of life" in and about Aurora. The Star of Feb. 13, '64, contains a double-page account of the hanging of four men (Daly, Buckley, Masterson and McDonald) for the murder of W. R. Johnson, a packer. So long as the roughs slew each other, no one interfered, but on this occasion the people arose and smote them—the stampede of the "fighters" as the story goes, seeming to carry the "luck" of the mines with it. When telegraphic connection was made with Aurora (June 1863), "cipher" dispatches were not in vogue, and operators took advantage of information—"points on stocks" passing over the wires—one named Williams making considerable money, but finally getting sent to State's prison. The Aurora wire dragged on the ground—a skip rope for coyotes—for years, ultimately being taken up and made to connect Austin and Belmont. The Bodie wire (constructed by Hon. J. W. Haines of Genoa) will doubtless be extended to Aurora at once, and should they "strike it rich" in the Del Monte, the Esmeralda Herald
Description of Esmeralda. "Bodie and Esmeralda".
(Page 51 cont'd)

(started as a weekly, Oct. 13, 1877, by Frank Kenyon) may be converted into a daily ere the close of the present year. Aurora at one time had two daily and one tri-weekly newspapers, and stranger things may happen again.

THE NEW REAL DEL MONTE.

Origin and Organization.

The success of the Bodie mines under new and enlightened management, led to the selection, by practically the same parties, of a portion of ground out of the Juniata and Last Chance patents, for a new deep shaft and system of exploration. The segregated ground is in extent 1000 feet square. The company was incorporated Oct. 15, 1877, with a capital of $5,000,000; 50,000 shares. Officers--H. M. Yerrington (President), N. K. Masten, R. N. Graves, Daniel Cook and A. J. Ralston. Andrew Baird, Secretary. Geo. Daly, Superintendent. The Juniata company had secured a large and important tract of ground, covered by U. S. patent. The company was incorporated Feb. 27, 1872; capital $5,000,000; 50,000 shares. J. D. Fry (President), A. K. P. Harmon, A. J. Ralston, Wm. Sharon and J. H. Dobinson. Same Secretary and office (304 California St.) as del Monte. All work, however, is centered on the new del Monte. The syndicate is a strong one, including Mackay and Fair, Sharon, Mills, the Cooks, Yerrington, Capt. Haynie, Baldwin, Boyd, Judge Belden, and others. Surely, here should be obtained a good working capital for at least one deep shaft, with ample drifts and crosscuts. The stock is not quoted in the market.

The New Works.

Mr. Daly is making a fine piece of work of the new shaft, which is a first class three-compartment; two 4X6 for hoisting, and one 4X5 for pump. (Ground was broken, Dec. 5.) The engine, running a double reel, is of capacity to sink 1500 feet. Everything is under good cover and in good shape. The shaft near 400 feet in depth. A station has been established at 300 feet, where the shaft passes through a six foot body of quartz that assays well. Cages are ordered, and preparations making to drift and crosscut. Over thirty men are employed--three eight hour shifts in the shaft. The formation is porphyritic and generally compact, requiring constant use of powder. As yet, all the water encountered is carried up with the rock. A pump will be ready, however, for all ordinary emergencies, and nothing but an earthquake or a volcano will be likely to interrupt the carrying out of a programme whereby Last Chance Hill, at least, will be as thoroughly and systematically explored as any like extent of mining ground in the world. The past history as to bullion produc-
Description of Esmeralda.
"Bodie and Esmeralda",
(Page 52, cont'd)

-8-

tion of Esmeralda alone justifies it; the natural formation sanctions it, and there seems to be a fatality about the two districts in question that makes it the proper thing to do on general principles.

Other Mining Matters.

It is a part of the Real del Monte programme to thoroughly overhaul the Antelope mill, and be ready for any developments. The company have two years supply of wood secured. Relocations under the U. S. laws have been going on for years, of late very brisk. Patents have been obtained for a number of the claims in addition to the Juniata—as the Antelope, Esmeralda, Lady Jane, Utah, Cortez, Sonora, Garibaldi and others. Work is expected to resume on the Antelope and Seminole, by individual owners.

GEOLOGICAL FORMATION AND OPINIONS.

Government Official Reports.

The following summary of Esmeralda District is found in the report for 1866 of R. H. Stretch, an able, careful observer of matters geological, and who was State Mineralogist of Nevada at the time:

The mines of Esmeralda are found in a bluish gray porphyry at the base of Mount Beryl, the quartz veins disappearing when the basalt and other rocks by which the porphyry is surrounded are reached. The greater portion of the locations are included in an area three miles north and south, by two in width, and lie chiefly south and east of the town of Aurora.

The majority of the veins have a course nearly coincident with magnetic north, and traverse a series of hills, commencing at the south with Silver Hill, and running across St. Mary's, Middle, Last Chance, Martinez, and Humboldt Hills, to the north end of the belt, the principal locations being in Silver, Middle, and Last Chance Hills.

The veins have a quartz gangue; vary greatly in width, from one or two, up to many feet; and may be classed under what are frequently denominated "pocket veins," or such as have the ore concentrated in bunched with barren ground between. This circumstance has operated powerfully to their disadvantage; the loss of the ore when a pocket or chamber was worked out, creating an unnecessary amount of alarm. The dip of the lodes is to the east, varying from nearly flat to vertical. It must not be supposed from the immense number of locations, that there is a corresponding number of veins—many of the locations being on the same lode, in different portions of its extent, and others having no more
foundation than a boulder, or a small slide detached from
some vein located higher up the hill. If carefully and
economically managed, the mines of Aurora may yet occupy a
good position among the almost countless districts of the
State.
Page 54:

In Ross Browne's report to the Federal Government,
1867, the following statement is found, concerning Esmeralda:
"It is the opinion of geologists that most of those
disturbances are confined to the first few hundred feet be-
neath the surface, and that below that point these ledges, which
promised so well, and some of which really were so rich above,
will again be found regular, compact, and most likely highly
metalliferous."
The old workings on Last Chance Hill were seldom
over 125 feet, most of the bullion being obtained at 90 feet
or less. The present State Mineralogist of Nevada, Mr. H. R.
Whitehill, a very capable and conscientious official, among
other things, in a letter recently said: "I have always thought
well of Last Chance Hill, and am somewhat surprised that the
work should have been abandoned for so long."

Conclusion.

Middle Hill, the more central and solid formation
of this great mineral belt, gives evidence of three great
fissures striking across in a northeast and southwest direc-
tion. The gigantic Esmeralda lode comes in from a due south
course, striking the great Winnemucca croppings on Silver
Hill (see sketch) at almost right angles, as if the former
were the main ledge of the district, all the rest being branch-
es thereof, twisted and broken out of their original place.
At all events, the entire belt is a most wonderful showing of
quartz, alongside of which the original Comstock was insig-
nificant. The Esmeralda ores are free milling, and contain both
gold and silver, the bullion being worth from $5 to $7 per
ounce. So rich were those of early days that pilfering was a
leading business, a hand mortar going night and day in every
cabin—so says the oldest inhabitant. Many thousands of tons
were milled that produced several thousand dollars per ton.
From the old Esmeralda lode, rich ores by the ton were blasted
off the weathered sides and crest, many feet above the surface,
and the old del Monte produced rich fruit in like manner. It
only remains to get at the roots of the Esmeralda district,
according to the belief of everyone interested, to realize
after the manner of California and Con. Virginia.