Courtesy Tuolumne County Museum

Sonora's Bunnell and Coles, Carpenters and Builders, building, which is the site of the St. James Church built in 1860. The Empire Market is visible on the right.

Chapter 3: Tuolumne County — Sonora, Columbia, Jamestown and vicinity

The history of Tuolumne County properly commences with the date of its discovery by civilized men; a date which a careful comparison of accounts would show to have been in the early part of the summer of 1848, at which time a party of miners—Philadelphians, as is recorded—came to Woods' Creek. This very significant fact may, then, be regarded as the starting point of these records. It was at this time that the western slope had begun to resound with the blows of the hardy gold-seekers, whom the unprecedented wave of immigration had moved to California, bringing the throngs of adventurers from many lands to people the heretofore silent canons and gorges of the auriferous belt, and to do their wonderful works, for which the world stands indebted.

It has been poetically said, that, at the time of the first discovery by Americans, the country was one of the most pictur-

The Sonoranian, who has been one of the most successful diggers in the ravine, besieged me to-day to sell him my pistols. They are an elegant pair, silver mounted and rifle bore, and good for duck or duelist—no matter which—for twenty or thirty paces. He offered me a pound of gold; so I determined to try the non-resistant principle, and let him have them. As he belted them about his waist, and strode off you would have advised even a California bear to get out of his way.

Walter Colton,
Friday, Nov. 10, 1849

Courtesy Library of Congress

Washington Street, Sonora, mid 1860s.

The immense traffic carried on on the roads that lead to the mining regions affords an extensive field for the profitable management of houses of entertainment. These may be encountered at almost every mile throughout the whole country, and they vary in size from a wooden two-story house to the very smallest kind of canvas shanty.

Frank Marryat, early 1850s

esque in the world. Noble forests existed, through which roamed the Indian and the deer. Streams of crystal clearness flowed, fish playing therein in all the freedom of security. The vast Sierra, bearing a diadem of snow, added grandeur to beauty. Pines and sequoias, the like of which can hardly elsewhere be found, tower heavenward. The oaks grew orchard-like in their regularity. Deer, antelope, wild fowl, in short, everything that was useful to man in his wild or unsophisticated state, here grew in profusion. This picture, though perhaps somewhat exaggerated, was not unfitted to the time and place.

Even now, after the lapse of a third of a century, and the desecration of land, the defilement of water-courses, and the annihilation of forests, the truth of those pictured lineaments may be seen, and one may lament the work of the pioneers that has destroyed so much of beauty while building up a great and glorious State—the brightest gem in Columbia's diadem.

The party of Philadelphians may, then, be regarded as the pioneers of Tuolumne County, for aught we know to the contrary. As mentioned above, they discovered Woods' Creek, naming it after their leader, the Rev. James Woods.

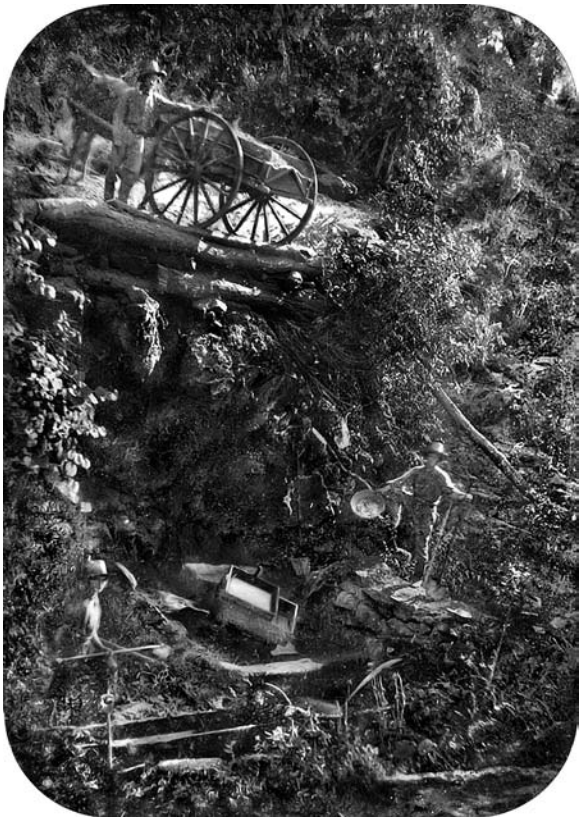
The next settlement was that of a party of Mexican miners. who, pushing up Woods' Creek beyond the Cross-

ing, located Sonorian Camp—a name afterwards changed to Sonora—all the inhabitants of which were of Spanish extraction, until the arrival of the first Americans, who came most probably in the spring of 1849.

In August, 1848, Colonel James, a lawyer of San Francisco, located on Woods' Creek, and entered into mining speculations, in the course of which Jamestown was founded; but as this perhaps too enterprising gentleman assumed liabilities which he could not meet, thereby distinguishing himself as the very first of the long line of unsuccessful speculators in mines. Judge Tuttle, arriving on Mormon Gulch, built the first log cabin in the county, the previous structures having been cloth tents or Mexican remadas or brush houses. This cabin became the nucleus of a village, which, in compliance with the custom of the times, was named Tuttletown.

Among the more notable discoveries made during the summer of 1848, was that of Jackass Gulch, for which name the accidental loss of a long-eared animal contributed.

Jackass Gulch, despite its name, immediately took rank as among the very richest of the diggings yet struck. Its gold was



Courtesy Bancroft Library

View of mining activities near Chinese Camp on the Tuolumne River, with Harvey Myron Sampson and Jeremiah Sampson.

A short time ago, Jim Hill, a man with a scar on his neck, went into a store at Camp Seco in the night and held pistols over the heads of the proprietors, while others of his gang stole the iron safe. Last night he was in Sonora. He went into a Spanish house of ill-fame, where Guadalupe, the keeper, is no doubt an accomplice. Hill took a pistol from a man, a stranger to him, struck him with it and then shot at him. The man ran out of the house, frightened, and gave the alarm, not knowing who had robbed and shot him. Hill then hid under a bed where he was found by the sheriff.

This morning a party of about a dozen of our most respectable citizens went to the jail and took Hill away to stand his trial at Camp Seco. His identity was proved and a fair and impartial trial was given before a jury of twelve men who rendered a verdict of guilty unanimously. It was then voted to hang the prisoner.

Enos Christman,
Saturday, June 28, 1851