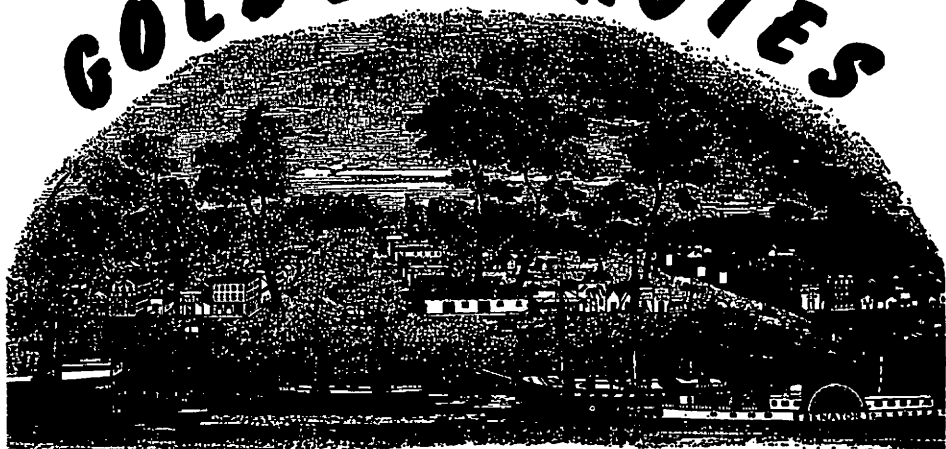


# GOLDEN NOTES



SACRAMENTO, WINTER OF 1849. (Facsimile of an illustration from the original edition.)

## Sacramento County Historical Society

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### TALES OF WELLS FARGO IN SACRAMENTO



by  
Joan Parker



One bright summer day in 1852, citizens of Sacramento noted a brief but intriguing item in their newspapers.

Dated June 28 (under a San Francisco dateline) the SACRAMENTO DAILY UNION reported:

"Three steamships arrived at this port yesterday... Among the passengers arrived by the OREGON was Mr. Samuel P. Carter, who has been sent out as the head of Wells, Fargo & Co.'s new Express Co. that is to be immediately established in this State. Their capital is \$300,000..."

Mr. Carter carried assignments in his carpet bag and ideas in his head. Both were soon to affect the lives of the people of "The City of the Plains". All California in fact was to be influenced by the arrival of the representative from Wells, Fargo & Co.

Two weeks later, Reuben W. Washburn sailed into San Francisco by fast packet, hurried to Montgomery Street, and set up the banking department. He found Mr. Carter had opened the express section ten days earlier.

Wells, Fargo & Co. -- express and banking -- had made ends meet and was ready to serve Californians. It has been working at both ever since.

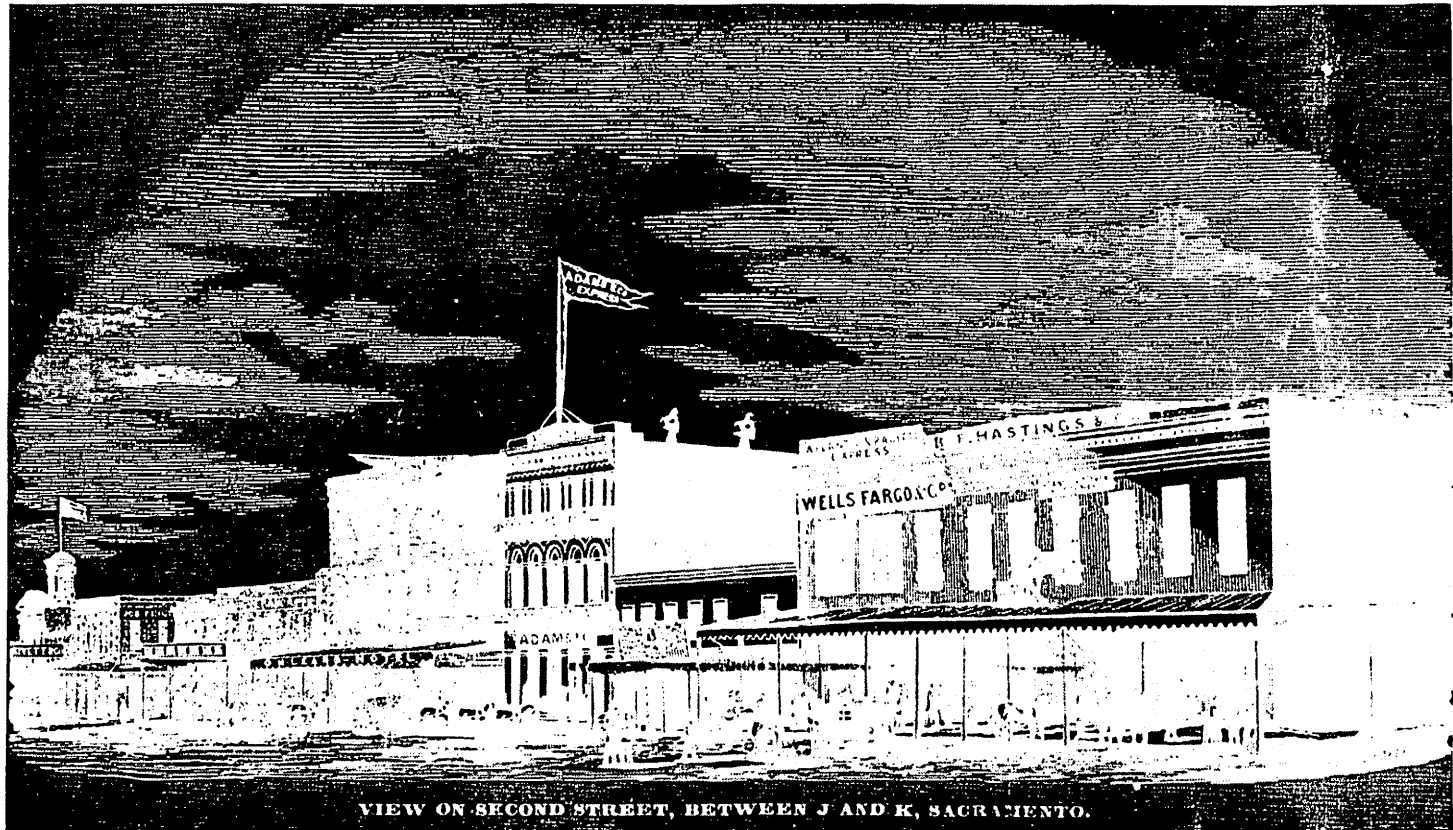
The new company took root, thrived lustily in its wild and comparatively uncivilized environment, began to expand.

The UNION kept an editorial eye on the enterprise. On July 16, 1852, it noted:

"NEW EXPRESS LINE - Wells, Fargo & Co., an express firm enjoying a high and enviable reputation in the East, have established a letter and package express between San Francisco and Sacramento. Mr. Osgood, one of the messengers of this firm, makes his trips on the steamer ANTELOPE. We are indebted to him for the delivery of our files yesterday morning."

Two weeks later, it reported:

"WELLS FARGO & CO'S EXPRESS - This enterprising firm, as our readers are aware, have established a branch of their extensive establishment in this country and are now daily, by trustworthy messengers, carrying letters, packages, etc., between the principal towns of the State. This firm in the Eastern States has enjoyed for a long time the full confidence and patronage of the heaviest business men."



VIEW ON SECOND STREET, BETWEEN J AND K, SACRAMENTO.

WELLS FARGO & CO. SACRAMENTO HEADQUARTERS IN THE 1850's.

The UNION scattered enthusiastic adjectives as the organization began to prove itself in its new territory.

Soon after opening headquarters in San Francisco, Wells Fargo established an agency in Sacramento, then central inland supply center for the gold mines. First agent in the young city was J. M. Hubbard, who stayed on the job until January 1, 1854.

Sacramento proved a lively spot in 1852. There was much to be done.

On the sea, business was brisk and all-encompassing. Through their local agency, the people of Sacramento had access to the far corners of the world. Let the advertisement (August 16, 1852) in the SACRAMENTO DAILY UNION tell the story:

"WELLS FARGO & CO.'S ATLANTIC AND PACIFIC EXPRESS  
per steamer PANAMA Saturday, August 14th.

Our next express for New York and all parts of the United States, Canada & Europe will be dispatched in charge of a special messenger - By the Pacific Mail SS Company's Steamship PANAMA on Saturday next, August 14, at 7 o'clock A.M. via Panama and Aspinwall.

GOLD DUST, COIN AND BULLION FOR SHIPMENT. Received until Friday 13th at 4 o'clock P.M. Small packages and parcels until 12 o'clock P.M. Friday.

BILLS OF EXCHANGE drawn on New York, payable at our Principal Office, No. 16 Wall Street & at our agencies in:

Boston, Hartford, New Haven, Albany, Troy, Utica, Syracuse, Oswego, Auburn, Rochester, Buffalo, Cleveland, Sandusky, Columbus, Cincinnati, Louisville, St. Louis, Toledo, Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, Peoria, Galena, Toronto, Hamilton, Montreal, Quebec, &c, &c...

WELLS FARGO & CO.

114 Montgomery Street between California and  
Montgomery Streets

No. 45 Second Street, Sacramento."

WELLS, FARGO & CO.

Wells, Fargo & Co.

San Francisco Cal  
Sept 12 1865

Payable for \$10000 No. 10000

First of Exchange second and third unpaid pay  
in U.S. Gold Coin

Payable to the order of \$10000 Dollars

When received and change the same to account  
Wells, Fargo & Co.  
St. Broadway New York

Wells Fargo issued Firsts, Seconds and Thirds of Exchange to transfer money East. One document went around the Horn by sea; one to Panama by ship, across the Isthmus and then by ship to the East Coast; and one by overland stagecoach. When the first document to be presented was paid, the others became worthless.

Sacramento, hub of Wells Fargo communications with the mines, camps, and diggings of the Mother Lode, hummed with activity on land, too.

The advertisement placed by the company in the UNION (September 3, 1852) gives an idea of Wells Fargo's part in the daily bustle:

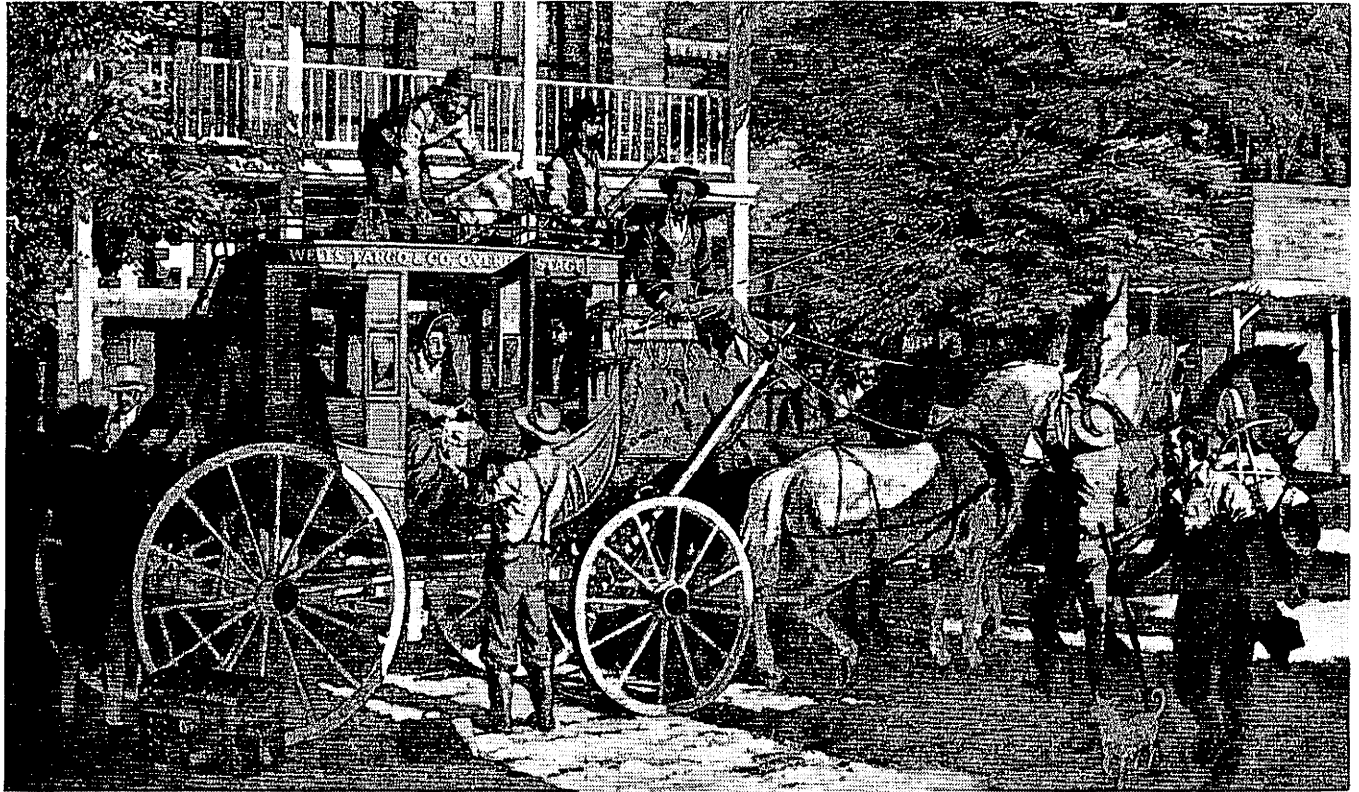
"RHODES & LUSK'S SHASTA EXPRESS leaves the office of Wells Fargo & Co., Sacramento, DAILY for Marysville, Colusa, Tehama, Shasta, Yreka, Weaverville, Salmon & Klamath Rivers, Scott River, Rogue River, French Gulch, Clear Creek & One Horse Town, connecting at Sacramento with Wells Fargo & Co.'s Daily Express to San Francisco and semi-monthly to the Atlantic States & Europe. TREASURE, letters, other packages conveyed to and from the points above designated with the utmost dispatch. GOLD DUST forwarded to the US Mints at Philadelphia & New Orleans, under policies from the most responsible Insurance Companies in the Eastern Cities. DRAFTS drawn by Rhodes, Purdy & McNulty of the Sacramento City Bank on New York, New Orleans, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh; State Bank of Ohio, at Mansfield, Ohio; Canal Bank, Cleveland. Collections made and all business pertaining to an Express Company executed promptly and with special regard to safety.

JAMES H. RHODES, HIRAM LUSK

WELLS FARGO & CO.

114 Montgomery Street, San Francisco, and  
Second Street between J and K, Sacramento."

In those days Second Street was seldom quiet. The Orleans Hotel, neighbor of the Wells Fargo agency in the 50's, was rallying point for stagecoaches awaiting the upriver steamer. In the early morning sometimes more than one hundred coaches--drivers calling their destinations--converged to wait for passengers and freight.



CONCORD COACH - For 40 years after the Gold Rush, coaches like these were the universal means of transportation for passengers, express and mail in the West.

The famous gold in them thar' hills poured into Sacramento for shipment to San Francisco. Sometimes coaches rattled right down to the wharf where Wells Fargo's famous and familiar green treasure chests were transferred into the hold of the steamer.

The ANTELOPE - fastest of all river traffic in her day - was often chosen by Wells Fargo to carry treasure downriver. She boasted a special gold room--shored up and reinforced to withstand the weight of treasure shipped aboard her.

Sometimes gold was weighed in and signed for in the Wells Fargo office and came aboard with a messenger. Receipts issued by Wells Fargo personnel occasionally totaled more than a million dollars on a single night.

November of Wells Fargo's first year in Sacramento was full of unforeseen events entailing unexpected additional duties. The town burned down and the national elections took place on the same day (November 2).

Starting in a little hat shop in the city's crowded commercial area, the fire ate up more than 1,600 buildings and caused an estimated five million dollars' worth of damage. One of the casualties was the Wells Fargo agency.

In the equally incendiary political arena, Democrat Franklin Pierce was elected president of the United States by a small margin over Whig Winfield Scott. Sacramento - like the rest of California - was wildly interested in the contest.

Two newspaper items tell the story.

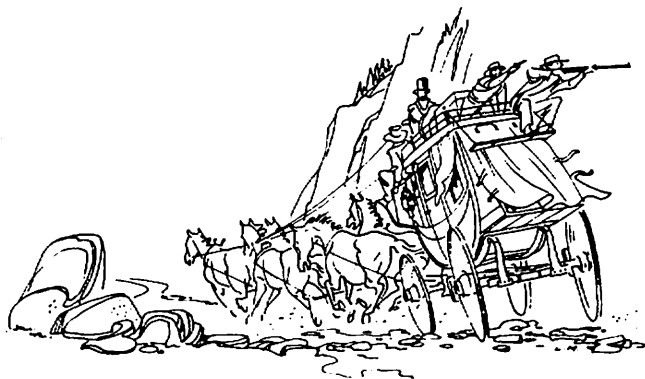
The UNION carries an item headlined "Subscription for the Relief of the Sufferers by the Late Fire at Sacramento City." Datelined "San Francisco, November 4, 1852," it reads:

"We the undersigned hereby agree to give the sums set opposite our respective names for the immediate relief of the sufferers by the late fire at Sacramento City." Wells Fargo & Co. heads the list with a donation of \$500. In a later story the UNION mentions that the company "has also sent up a large lot of clothing, etc."

Among their other charges, Wells Fargo messengers carried election news. The ALTA CALIFORNIA (November 5, 1852) mentions receipt via this source of "carefully prepared special returns from Placer, Yuba, El Dorado, Sutter, Yolo, Colusa, Butte, and San Joaquin counties."

The month following, results of the voting of the entire nation arrived. Said the UNION (December 7) appending an accolade to its comment on the election to Congress from Cayuga County, New York, of Edwin B. Morgan:

"Edwin B. Morgan is the President of the Express Company of Well, Fargo & Co., which express, by the way, has won considerable credit by its rather speedy delivery of the election news."



WELLS, FARGO & CO.  
NEW YORK AND CALIFORNIA EXPRESS AND EXCHANGE COMPANY.

Sacramento Office, Aug 1<sup>st</sup> 1866

Mr Wm Dargener  
Cgt Columbia

Dear Sir: Yrs of July 29<sup>th</sup> is at hand

21 Daily Unions and 38 Weeklies  
will weigh 14 lbs per week at 15¢  
\$2.10 8 Weeks \$16.80

I do not see how we can afford  
to do it for less than \$8 per Month or \$2  
per Week

However if you contracted  
with Mr Brown to do his business at \$1  
per month, make the deduction in the  
Way Bill or if too late to do that let  
his know it and we will arrange it  
satisfactorily.

Yrs truly  
Wm Hayden  
Cgt

Calamity followed calamity that four year. Next came the floods. By January, 1853, the Sacramento River had risen 22 feet above the low-water mark at the town of Sacramento. Some camps were cut off from supplies for weeks at a time. The price of bread was said to have risen occasionally to a dollar a loaf. Throughout, Wells, Fargo & Company carried on as best it could.

Said the SAN FRANCISCO HERALD (December 17, 1852):

"It is only during such tempestuous weather as that of the past few weeks that our people can fully appreciate the services of the admirable express lines that have their center in this city and radiate to all parts of the state and world.

"The roads throughout the interior have become almost impassable morasses, rivulets have swollen to rushing streams and brooks to roaring torrents.

"Yet in the face of the obstacles and beset by the pitiless storm the energetic and ever faithful expressman plunges forward on his mission bearing to the miners in the most remote ravines tidings of their families and friends far away and returning with their budget of news collected from every quarter of the state....Wells, Fargo & Co., a firm which has gained rapidly in public favor and is now fully and successfully established made extraordinary exertions to supply the press here with the first news -- they succeeded. In addition, they are very prompt and often in advance in furnishing us with news from the most remote towns of the interior..."

A company is only as colorful as the men who work for it. During its more than half a century in Sacramento, some interesting staff members appeared at the Sacramento office.



J. L. (JIM) TUCKER



SAM KNIGHT



HOMER KING

In 1857 Samuel Knight took over from W. B. Rochester, who had been at the post three years. At the same time, a 16-year-old named Homer King went to work as letter clerk. (An 1857 directory of Sacramento, however, generously lists him as "agent").

Both men went on to higher things.

Sam Knight, less than a decade later when he had become Wells Fargo's main business agent in San Francisco, was blown to heaven by the first explosion ever recorded in that region of an unknown substance called nitroglycerine. It was then uneasily referred to as blasting oil. Given a chance it certainly did.

As freight agents on the West Coast for the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, Wells Fargo had received two leaking unlabeled wooden boxes which were taken to their San Francisco offices as damaged freight. When a workman struck one to open it, a tremendous explosion took most of the Wells Fargo office and the adjoining Pacific Union Club with it. Several employees of each establishment were killed. Among them was the unfortunate Sam Knight.

Homer King, who spent six years at his quill in Sacramento, became tenth president of Wells Fargo in 1903. He was still president in 1905 when the company's expressing and banking functions were separated. His was the Horatio Alger story of the young man who worked his way up from clerk to cahier to agent to treasurer to manager to president.

His career with Wells Fargo also ended on a spectacular note.

On January 10, 1905, he resigned as president of Wells Fargo Bank and was elected president of the Bank of California, not necessarily in that order.

"The Election of Homer S. King, president of Wells Fargo Bank to be the new president of the Bank of California came somewhat as a surprise in the general mercantile community," reported the WASP (January 14, 1905) with admirable understatement.

Felix Tracy, who spent 15 years beginning in 1868 at the Sacramento agency, came to California from New York in 1849. He tried his luck panning for gold along the North Fork of the American River. Later he switched to expressing. At one time, he was known as the oldest expressman in California, having spent nearly 27 years at it.

During his stay in Sacramento he was a school director for the city for two terms and president of the board for three. His obituary in the RECORD UNION (June 13, 1902) headed: "Good Man Goes to His Reward" calls him a "constant friend of all educational movements and one of the fathers of the University of California."

J. L. Tucker became Sacramento agent in 1904, a post he held more than a decade.

Active in city affairs, he was elected a member of the Sacramento Chamber of Commerce in April, 1904. His name appears on the rolls as "J. L. Tucker, superintendent of Wells Fargo." A notation reads:

"Secretary Morris Brooke saw the value of publicizing the occupation as well as the name of the joining member. Thus the Chamber could proclaim its broad interests for in that one list were farmers, transportation men, a county official, city business men and a doctor..."

In 1918 Wells Fargo's long and colorful career as an express company ended. As a wartime measure, the United States government requested the merger of the country's seven major express companies into the American Railway Express Company.

Wells Fargo returned to Sacramento in 1960 with the merger of two of the oldest bloodlines in banking: Wells Fargo Bank and the American Trust Company. At present there are half a dozen branches serving the city and plans for construction of five additional offices.

The state capitol has been chosen to headquarter Wells Fargo's Valley Division composed of branches in 17 other cities. And present plans decree that mementoes of Sacramento's golden days will return home in a permanent exhibit in the new valley headquarters scheduled for construction in the redevelopment project of "The City of the Plains".

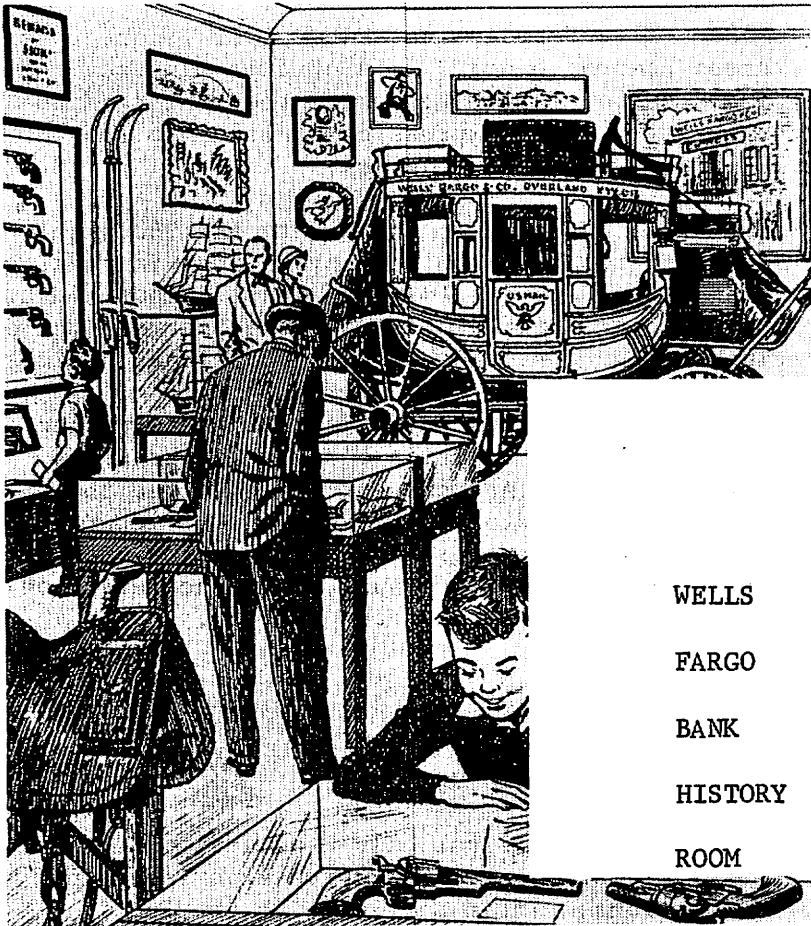
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THE AUTHOR



Miss Joan Parker is not only a professional free lance writer, but has had extensive experience in public relations. After serving with the Public Information Office of the U.S. Air Force in the European theatre, she settled in San Francisco where she has contributed her talents to public relations aspects of many recent fund raising campaigns and elections. At the present time, she is a member of the Public Relations Staff of Wells Fargo Bank.





WELLS

FARGO

BANK

HISTORY

ROOM

The Wells Fargo Bank is to be applauded for the tremendous step it has taken to preserve the colorful history of California. It has created the Wells Fargo Bank History Room. The room is a treasure trove for information on Wells Fargo and the Old West. To visit it is to relive those colorful decades of California which stretch from the discovery of gold to the fire of 1906. Whether the visitor is fascinated by the excitement of early Western perils, collectors' items, or the historical basis of San Francisco traditions, the History Room is the place to find it. And facts and figures on almost everything from transportation to gold panning are available in the reference library.

Not only does the museum have many special items and collections, it also provides a general insight into the times and lives of the West's pioneers - some notable,

other notorious, but all colorful. Their images -- retained through etchings, daguerreotypes, and paintings -- are kept on display and a large collection of photographs offers visible evidence of their tools of trade and more treasured possessions.

The History Room began in a small way, almost by accident, some 42 years ago. G. W. Wickland, then advertising and public relations manager of Wells Fargo Bank, had developed a hobby of collecting gold samples, treasure chests, rare prints, old iron doors -- anything associated with the bank's glamorous early days.

He was able to acquire an authentic stagecoach in 1928, but being unable to house the vehicle, made it and his entire collection available to the bank. Other employees offered contributions and the bank gladly provided space. In 1935, the city of San Diego brought the collection to the public eye at the California Pacific International Exposition. Shortly after, on Treasure Island at the Golden Gate Exposition in 1939-40, the collection was the highlight of San Francisco's exhibit.

Lack of space prohibits a detailed account of the many attractions to be found in the History Room and the vital information available to the student of history, but we must briefly touch upon a few of its highlights.

The main attraction is the bright red Concord stagecoach which once rolled over the Sierra Nevada Range from Hangtown, California, to Carson City, Nevada. Also prominently displayed is a set of cast iron doors, standard equipment for all Wells Fargo & Company agencies. This particular set is a memento to Agent George Morris, who chose to shoot it out at China Camp rather than surrender the treasure entrusted to him. In his lone stand he lost his life, and his epitaph is the bullet dent in the now rusty doors. When visitors register in the History Room guest book, they sit at the desk where Mark Twain wrote "Roughing It".

The gold division of the History Room includes the shovel, cradle and rocker that belonged to James Marshall, an iron mortar and pestle used to grind up gold bearing quartz and an assortment of other instruments revealing that the miners worked for what they got in the scramble for gold. The delicately balanced scales housed in the old Wells Fargo Office in Columbia, upon which it is estimated that over \$50,000,000 worth of gold was weighed is an important part of this collection. This division contains several outstanding gold collections. One contains samples of gold as it was actually found in some forty different California stream beds and lodes. Another is a collection of coins and slugs bearing the names of the private business houses which melted the raw gold into slugs and guaranteed them by stamping their names on the metal.

The visitor may see samples of the documents of exchange used to send money or gold to the East. For safety first, second and third documents of exchange were sent -- one around the Horn, another by Panama, and the last by stage. The first to arrive was honored.

In one of the display cases sits a large silver watch engraved for stage driver James Miller who saved a \$30,000 payroll with bloodcurdling heroism. Offered a reward of his own choosing, he asked for a "damn big bullion watch and chain" - and, you'll agree when you see it, that's what he got.

There is a special commemorating rifle which was presented to Stephen Benard, which contains an engraving depicting his slaying of three bandits who attempted to hold up and rob his stagecoach.

The Wiltsee collection of Western stamps, franks and postmarks gives examples of 235 of the 400 Western express companies which carried the mail from 1849 to 1859. Researchers find this the largest public display of Western covers, more valuable than stamps because they are more complete.

The rogues' gallery includes portraits of famous early-day stickup men, and features posters offering rewards that led to their capture. One of them was the notorious Black Bart.

No mention of the History Room would be complete without reference to Miss Irene Simpson, its curator. She is well known throughout the State, not only for outstanding performance in this position but for her vibrant interest. We are indebted to Miss Simpson and her associates, Thelma Rosenberg and Mrs. Bert Regan for the outstanding contribution to the preservation of our heritage.

Certain members of our own society have played a part in the creation of the History Room. The actual arrangement of the History Room was done by our own Norman Wilson under the direction of Aubrey Neasham and his Western Heritage, Inc.

Those of our society who have not seen the Wells Fargo History Room should make it a point to visit 420 Montgomery Street, San Francisco -- just 10 feet south of the location of the first Wells Fargo Office built in 1852. The Room is open every banking day between the hours of 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Needless to say, the welcome you will receive will be warm and sincere.

Editor

