

## Vernon

### From Thompson and West's *History of Sutter County, 1879*

The once-flourishing town of Vernon, situated on the east bank of Sacramento river, at its confluence with Feather river, was the pioneer town of Sutter county. In April 1849, Franklin Bates, E. O. Crosby and Beser Simmons, purchased of John A. Sutter a strip of land, three miles along the Sacramento and Feather rivers, and extending one mile back. This they proceeded to lay out for a town on a grand scale. One mile square, at the junction of the rivers, was laid out in lots, while the two miles above were designed for the country residences and elegant villas that would be the necessary accompaniments of a city such as this was designed to be. Mr. Sutter owned one-fourth of the lots. At that time it was supposed that this point was the head of navigation, and it was well known that a town, situated at the place where merchandise and passengers bound for the mines must be disembarked, was destined to become a city of no small importance. The preceding winter had been a dry one, and Feather river unnavigable, and for this reasons it was thought that vessel would be compelled to unload their cargoes at its mouth, and thus the town of Vernon would become the base of supplies for the northern mines. This belief was much strengthened, when, but a short time after the laying out of the town, several ships from Eastern ports discharged their cargoes here. Immediately several wholesale stores were established, and ox teams and pack trains came for supplies for the mines on the Feather and Yuba rivers. The prospects for a glorious future for the town seemed bright indeed. Lots sold rapidly and at a high price, some bringing \$1,000 each. Gilbert A. Grant was agent for the sale of lots, and kept the town well advertised. August 6, 1849, he had an advertisement in the Placer Times, calling the attention of the miners and traders on Yuba and Feather rivers, and Moth, Fish and Bear creeks, to the advantages offered by the town of Vernon as a place to secure supplies; also that a post-office had been established here, and all letters sent to him would be forwarded by mail to the United States without delay. This last feature was great attraction, as the post-office facilities were very few, and the miners had great difficulty in sending or receiving mails.

These lots were largely bought by speculators, who had only the town plat to examine when they made their purchase, and it was no uncommon thing to see a man with a map in his hand, searching along the edge of the tule to find this lot that presented so fine an appearance on the paper.

Captain James Savage was in 1848, on the coast of Chile, procuring a cargo of mahogany to carry to New York, when he heard of the California gold excitement. He immediately brought his vessel and cargo here, and anchored at the mouth of the Feather river. He unloaded his cargo, and commenced the construction of a hotel, using the mahogany for the

frame-work. He paid \$25 per day for labor in the construction, and when finished, had a hotel 75x45 feet in dimensions, three stories high, and built of very costly material. The upper floor was fitted up for a Masonic hall, but no lodge was ever organized. Some of the buildings first erected were of canvas, but they were soon replaced by frame structures. In August, 1849, the town consisted of one hotel, several boarding house, stores, saloons and gambling houses, bowling alley, blacksmith shops, butcher shops, laundries, post-office, etc. Gilbert A. Grant was selected Alcalde, and held that position until the following June; all of the old transfers of lots are recorded in his Alcalde book which is on file in the County Clerk's office at Yuba City. Some of the business men at this time were: Captain Savage, Bradbury Co., and Williams & Co. George W. Crane had a law office there. There were about fifty frame buildings and one zinc house.

Previous to this, Jonas Spect settled on the opposite bank of Sacramento river, and located the town of Fremont. He established a ferry between that place and Vernon, in 1849, which was kept in continuous operation by him and other parties, until 1878, when it was abandoned as unprofitable. The vessels that came up the river were schooners and sloops, no steamers having as yet made their appearance. About the first of July, 1849, the river fell so low that vessels coming up the stream ran aground at Russian Crossing, a shoal place some fifteen miles below. The winter of 1849-50, was very rainy, and the river raised so high that the steamers, which then made their appearance, went as far up as Nye's ranch, the present city of Marysville. This gave an impetus to the latter city and struck a deadly blow at the prospects of Vernon. Immediately the town began to retrograde, and the speculators transferred their affections to Marysville, Yuba City and Nicolaus, and the other towns that were laid out further up the stream. The town still struggled for an existence. E. O. Crosby, a property owner here, was a member of the Senate in the session of 1850-51, and succeeded in having the county seat located at Vernon; but it was removed the next year. The sessions of the court were held at the hotel, which was also used as a jail for the only prisoner confined here. A chain was fastened to his leg and a hole made in the partition, through which the chain was passed and fastened with a clog. Notwithstanding the acquisition of the county seat, the town continued steadily to decline; business left it for more favorable localities, and as there was nothing left for it to live upon it died from actual necessity. In 1853, all that was left was the hotel, blacksmith shop, postoffice, and eleven houses. That year the hotel ceased to be kept as a regular public house, and the postoffice was removed. Since then the mails have been brought from Nicolaus, chiefly.

Three hundred and thirty acres, adjoining Vernon on the south, were purchased from Sutter May 4, 1850 by James Sevice, Wales S. Porter and Gilbert A. Grant. These enterprising men laid out here a new town, called "Lower Vernon," and attempted to build up a city. The reason for this action was that the river and bank at this point were more favorable for a vessel landing than at the old place. This movement was made too late, however, as Vernon had

already begun to decline, and the time had passed when there was any hope of establishing a city in this locality. But few houses were built at this place, and they were soon removed. No attempt was ever made to build any of the suburban residences so grandly projected by the founders of the town. When the Sutter grant was confirmed, this strip was not included, and David Abdill and C. G. Roth, pre-empted a large portion of it as Government land. There are now in the town the residences of these two gentlemen, and several huts occupied by Kanaka fishermen and their families. This has always been quite a fish point, since 1849, and large quantities of perch and salmon are annually caught here. The Kanakas came to this place about fifteen years ago. They go down the river early in the season, and follow the fish in their course up the stream. Fishermen from Sacramento and Marysville also come up to this point. The old hotel was destroyed by fire in 1868, and with it a large telescope that Mr. Abdill had used at various places for observations. Mr. Abdill was residing in the house at the time of the fire.

The first public school was kept in 1857, part of the time in the hotel, and the remainder in the old bowling alley. In 1863, Mr. Abdill and a few others built a school house which is still used. It is in the Vernon district. Religious services were occasionally held in the hotel by circuit ministers of the M. E. denomination; the first being prior to 1860. When the school house was built services were held there. About that time a minister of the United Brethren denomination preached here frequently for several years. After that the M. E. ministers again took charge and held services here monthly, until 1878, when they were discontinued.