

GOLD RUSH MAESTRO

"The Journal of August Wettermann"

Edited and Annotated by
Kenneth Brungess

PREFACE

A "Mother Lode" for Performing Artists, Too!

You will find it hard to believe that there stood at one time a fiercely flourishing little city of two or three thousand souls, with its newspaper, fire company, brass band, volunteer militia, bank, hotels, noisy Fourth of July processions, gambling hells crammed with tobacco smoke, profanity, and rough-bearded men of all nations and colors, with tables heaped with gold dust sufficient for the revenues of a...principality. It was the only population of its kind that the world has ever seen gathered together, and it is not likely that the world will ever see its like again.
—Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (1872)

In 1848 Horace Greeley ("Go West, young man!") predicted that "We are on the brink of an Age of Gold." He estimated that California would add "at least one thousand millions of dollars to the aggregate of gold in circulation in the world." By the end of 1852, approximately 225,000 gold-seekers had arrived in California, including "Latin Americans," Frenchmen, Germans, Englishmen, Australians, and representatives from what would become the all-important labor force, the Chinese.

But as the many published diaries and journals of these Argonauts later revealed, few struck it rich. A large percentage returned home, dejected and penniless. The few who remained saw California as a land of great

opportunity and acquired much personal wealth through a variety of more traditional methods.

From 1849 onward, those with good business sense began establishing mercantiles, hotels, gambling houses, banks, miners' supply stores, bars, and even makeshift "B&Bs" up in the diggings. It is well documented that these "forty-niner" entrepreneurs were profitable, a result of their charging premium prices (in gold tender) for goods and services. (The scales were often weighted in their favor!)

Some of the most successful of these bought large parcels of land in California's fertile Central Valley. One powerful consortium known as "The Big Four"—Colis P. Huntington, Leland Stanford, Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins, all former pioneer merchants—combined their considerable wealth to fund the building of the Central Pacific Railroad. The joining of their railroad with the Union Pacific, in Utah Territory in the spring of 1869, created the behemoth known as the Transcontinental Railroad. Not only was this union one of the most monumental enterprises in our nation's history, but it also allowed the much-talked-about western expansion to finally become a reality.

However, there is one important segment of Gold Rush society that has been consistently overlooked by historians, historiographers, and sociologists. It is a group of creative, well-educated individuals that thrived almost from the moment they arrived, while at the same time making a valuable contribution to the lives of all, from prosperous city folk to scruffy miners. This subculture consisted of the multitude of fine musicians, opera singers, and other first-rate entertainers from the eastern US and around the world. These performers made the arduous journey to California in the hope of finding regular employment—and perhaps to strike it rich.

These creative folks didn't come west merely to soil their hands panning for gold. As true entertainers, they

looked forward to offering their considerable creative talents to the masses of uprooted souls who were hungry for entertainment and diversion, and they expected to be well-compensated for doing so. Thus, impresarios and managers could charge extravagant fees for their artists and productions, and stories abound about recreation-starved miners throwing nuggets or bags of gold dust at the feet of their favorite performers during curtain calls.

With the exception of divas such as Lotta Crabtree or Lola Montez, very little has been written about the lives of professional Gold Rush performing artists such as our subject, August Wetterman. Because of his conservatory training in Stockholm and his exceptional musicianship, Wetterman was never without employment as a musician. In fact, on the very next afternoon after Wetterman and his cronies left the *Jackim* in San Francisco Bay (they had served as the ship's band in exchange for passage 'round the Horn), the group was immediately engaged to play at a hotel owned by a fellow Swedish countryman. (The captain had asked the band to perform at his welcoming luncheon reception, at which a number of prominent Swedish businessmen and civic leaders were in attendance. This coincidence led to their hiring at the hotel in San Francisco.) On that evening the group was dubbed "The Jenny Lind Band" in honor of the world famous *Swedish Nightingale*.

The band's timely employment marks the beginning of Wetterman's many adventures in Gold Rush California, from his early days in San Francisco, to the diggins in the Sierra foothills, to Sacramento, and finally back to San Francisco, where he would live out his days as a highly respected and celebrated member of that flourishing city.

Until this publication of *The Wetterman Journal*, no California history (or American history) book or periodical has drawn attention to, or highlighted any account of, the significant events of the period 1850–1889 from the unique

frame of reference and perspective of a professional Gold Rush musician—one with privileged access to many of California's determining events.

--K.B

Excerpts from. . .
GOLD RUSH MAESTRO
"The Journal of August Wetterman"

I was born in the city of Westeras, Sweden on August 16th 1828. My father was a Norwegian, a major in the Norwegian army stationed at Stockholm, Sweden. My mother was a Swede, her maiden name being Anna Lovisa Astrom. Her father was a merchant. I attended public school until the age of twelve years. In 1840 I became a musician in the Swedish army and in 1848 was promoted to principal musician (oboist), one of the directors of the Pension Fund, instructor in music and drill-master.



Seal of The Royal Academy
of Music, Stockholm
Est'd. 1771

In 1844 Westmanlands Regiment and Music Corps were ordered to Stockholm to the funeral of Carl XIV, Johan, King of Sweden and Norway; also in 1850 to the wedding of Crown Prince Carl (afterward XV of Sweden and Norway) and Princess Louise of the Netherlands.



Karl XV of Sweden & Princess Louise of The Netherlands
Courtesy of: Dunkerqueenflandre

TWO SURPRISE VISITORS

In 1850 I studied at the musical conservatory at Stockholm. One day pondering over my lesson, I heard a tap at the door and said, "Come in." There were two gentlemen, to me perfect strangers. One was from the King's Theatre Orchestra, the other from the King's First Guards. The latter asked me if I would like to go to California and if I had seen the advertisement from Captain Norman that he wished to have a band of about six musicians to go with him to San Francisco, California. I told the gentlemen that I had been too busy and had not seen it. The captain's office being only a few blocks away and it being about his office hours, we started to see him.

The captain was home and when he heard that we were musicians, he began to tell us about Califor-

nia, a thing which he was very able to do, as he had made two trips already from Valparaiso to San Francisco with provisions in 1849. On his last trip he made \$35,000 clear. We were told that musicians were very scarce in San Francisco and that if we were a good band, we would do a good business. We liked the captain, the way he spoke and we thought him to be the very best kind of man. This he proved to be.

Having something of the Viking in us, we decided to go to California. The captain was satisfied with our appearance, but there were only three of us present instead of five or six and the captain did not want to buy the pig in the bag, but wished to hear us play. So it was agreed that we should return again the next day with the other members and with our instruments. And we indeed surprised him as we gave him three different kinds of instrumentations, stringed-orchestra, reed-band and brass and music. The captain was very much pleased and it was agreed that we should meet him in the city of Sundswall, where his brig was built and loaded with copper, iron, plank, etc. The members of the band were Carl Carlson, Christian Skanberg, Gustaf Sundgren, August Wetterman and Carl Eklund. As we had about a week on our hands, we gave a concert at the Casino [at Sundswall] and did very well.

... ROUGH SEAS

The voyage across the North Sea was something terrible; for over a week's time the brig was jump-

ing up and down so that she was only able to carry bottom reefed fore top sail and seemed ready to tip over at any time. It took us a fortnight to reach Cowes, Isle of Wight, where the brig was copped.



During the two weeks we stayed at Cowes we gave two evening concerts and one morning concert (matinee); and at the matinee, the Duchess of Wellington was present. We finished with "God save the Queen," using brass instruments. The whole audience stood up at the "fine" and the Duchess came up to the orchestra, followed by some of the audience, and thanked us for the music. The Duchess invited us to dinner that same evening at nine o'clock and asked us if we would bring our

instruments along. Of course we were very glad to do so.



Queen Victoria's Osborne House
Courtesy of: WyrdLight.com

After dinner we played several pieces. We were asked if we had any books such as artists used for signatures of names for recommendations. We had none so the Duchess gave us some of her cards. We were also asked if we would like to play for the Queen, who was then at her summer residence, Osborn, with Prince Albert, her consort, whom we had seen several times in their carriage riding on the Island. Naturally we felt very much honored to think that the Duchess considered us worthy to play for the Queen, who was herself a very good

musician. Captain Norman, when he heard of this, said: "I am sorry, but the vessel will soon be ready, and I do not wish to make any delay." I can only say that I feel very much honored by the invitation and in knowing that I have a good band.



Royal Family at Osborne

... A ROYAL WELCOME

One day we told the captain that we would like to go on board the English Man-of-War, which lay at anchor close to us. He gave us permission and two of our sailors took us to the big ship; but the officer of the day would not allow us to board the ship. So one of our bandmen said, "Send up the cards the Duchess of Wellington gave us." That was done and we were well received and an officer kindly showed us all around the ship and the band played for us.



British Man O' War Attacking Ships In Harbor
John Thomas Serres [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons



The San Carlos Entering the Bay of San Francisco
Courtesy, Michael Slater, BoatingSF.com

...THE 'GOLDEN GATE' IN SIGHT!

On the first of April we saw Mount Tamalpais; but it being late in the afternoon, the captain would not take pilot (at that time it was not compulsory) and dark setting in, we were obliged to tack out from land. This last night on the ocean was the hardest experience of our long voyage. A heavy west wind was blowing, and in tacking, the rudder chain broke and the boatman and the carpenter, in the dark, had to be lowered down to fix the rudder; lost a boat also that night.

...THE END OF OUR VOYAGE!

Next day, April 2nd, 1851, we passed through the Golden Gate, passed the Fort Point, the Presidio, with a few huts and little houses along the now northern part of the city; also a small number of tents on Telegraph Hill. In the bay from the east side of San Francisco to Oakland were hundreds of ships of all descriptions, very few of which had a man aboard, as captains and crews had all left for the mines. Many vessels were loaded and had to remain so on account of scarcity of hands to work them.

...A WELCOMING PARTY

On the afternoon and evening of our arrival many visitors came on board to welcome our captain, who was well known in San Francisco, and to congratulate him on his successful voyage. The captain gave them a good reception and that the band played need not be told. In fact, we all had

the very best time and the music was much appreciated.



Abandoned ships fill San Francisco Harbor in 1851.

... AN IMMEDIATE ENGAGEMENT!

One of the captain's friends, Mr. Qvillfeldt, who was formerly an officer in the Swedish army, invited the band for lunch the next day at twelve o'clock. We took our music and instruments along as the gentleman had kindly offered to find a hotel for us. The lunch was most excellent; and among the many good things we had bearsteak. Oh! It was just fine. At lunch was present an American gentleman, Mr. Stevenson, proprietor of the California Exchange on the northeast corner of Kearny and Clay streets. After hearing us play, he engaged us right away for his concert hall, to begin the same day, offering us sixteen dollars a piece

per man. The hall was called The California Exchange and was the largest hall in the city.

This being the time Jenny Lind had so successfully appeared in the Eastern States, everything began to be called by her name; such as Jenny Lind hat, cake, drink, etc., and we being her countrymen, Mr. Stevenson baptized us the Jenny Lind Band, in a bumper of champagne. The Jenny Lind Band consisted of August Wetterman, leader; Carl Carlson, Christian Skanberg, Gustaf Sundgren. Extra men for parades, etc. were Martin Josephson, Carl Russ, Johnson and Fred Tittle.

...OFF TO THE MINES!

At a gambling house in Marysville, I saw Max Homeier and his wife and Franz Oettl and his wife, who were singing and playing in Tyrolian costumes. Max Homeier was the best zither player and years after he often played with us at concerts at San Francisco.

In Marysville we stored up all our worldly belongings in our trunks with clothes, music, etc., and through the advice of Captain Wirstrom we bought two mining costumes apiece and mining tools. We soon after arrived at Bidwell's Bar. The life at the mining camp was a unique experience for us.

AT THE DIGGIN'S...

Carlson and I, with our mining tools began to work on the Bar. From sunrise to sundown we

worked and all that we got for the day's work was fifty cents each. Carlson, who had always imagined that we would stumble over big pieces of gold as soon as we set foot on California, found himself very much disappointed and left immediately for San Francisco, which had now begun to build up, and where musicians were very much wanted for gambling houses, etc.



Bidwell's Bar, circa 1854

With a party, I went down the river where Oroville is now situated. We were the first prospectors at that place. From here we went to Natches on Horncut Creek where we found a good deal of coarse gold and made from \$12 to \$25 a day for about two months.

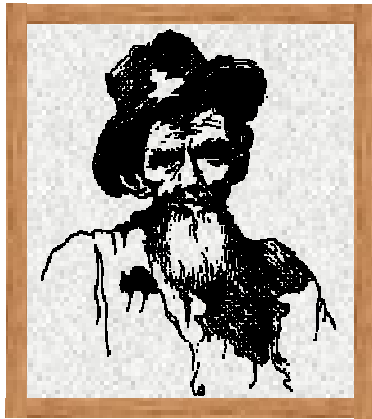
...A MINER'S FOURTH OF JULY

My first Fourth of July I celebrated in this camp. Being the only musician left of the band, I played the patriotic airs on my E-flat cornet and other miners joined in singing with me. A minister made the prayer and a lawyer read the Declaration of Independence, and everything went off gloriously.

My service was all for glory, while my colleagues in San Francisco were paid \$50 a man, double for leader for the parade. But what's the difference? I was standing, walking, lying and all surrounded with gold. Why should I care? Two of our men who had been up north on a prospecting tour came back with news of rich mines. We five in camp bought two pack mules, and together with other miners, started for the west branch of Butte Creek, where we made out pretty good.

We thought that we had had enough of mining, so we started for San Francisco. On the way down and about twenty miles north of Marysville was a log cabin with bunks along the walls and a bar. We went in to have a drink, the price being two bits a drink. As there being no coin, we pulled out our gold dust bag and poured out enough gold without weighing it, and in that way the bar generally got more than double what the drink was worth. I saw a man across the bar looking and laughing at me who looked somewhat familiar. I was pondering on where I had seen him, thinking that we must have met somewhere. I saluted and he did the same; I took a drink, he followed suit,

and in fact, whatever I would do, he would do. Of course I began to feel very much annoyed by this continued mockery and wished to have an explanation. On the wall was a very large mirror which reflected the scarecrow figure of myself. I could never imagine that I looked like that kind of ruffian. During my stay in the mines I had a very small pocket glass in which I could see one eye, the tip of the nose, but not the whole face at once. I felt very much ashamed of myself and did not say anything to my comrades until we had gone to bed, until I told the whole thing and how near I came to having a fight with myself.

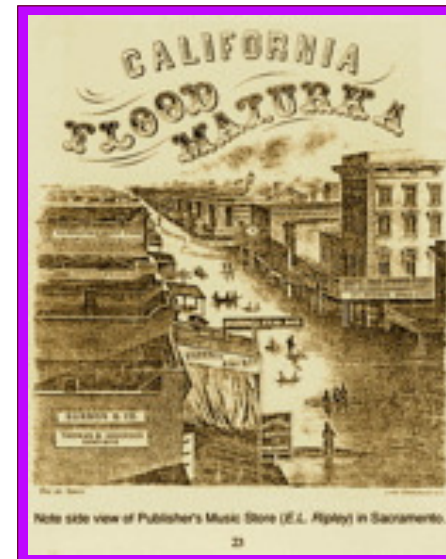


'Forty-Niner' by Blanding Sloan

...THE FLOOD OF 1852

Carlson and I roomed together in a small cottage on I street. One night in the latter part of March, 1852, we were awakened by ringing of bells, shrieks and howling by people in the streets. The American River had broken through to the slough and through to the I street levee, just two houses

west of where we lived. Carlson left immediately for San Francisco. I remained and was unable to cross the street, so had nothing to eat for two days, but lots to drink, as the whole city was covered with from two to five feet of water, which was running very swiftly over the lower countries. At a house next door to where I lived, a boy about five years old was on the sidewalk playing ships and boats with some wooden pieces. The little fellow became dizzy from looking at the swift waters and tumbled head foremost into the stream. With very little trouble I soon got him up on the sidewalk and the mother came running out, hearing the boy scream for dear life. The next day I heard that he was all right.



Sale Proceeds went to Flood Victims

... IN SAN FRANCISCO FOR GOOD

A joint stock company began a season at the American Theatre in San Francisco, consisting of Joseph Proctor, Mrs. Proctor, Charles King, George Ryder, Venena, Mrs. Stark, Mrs. Woodward (Steward) Bassett, Harry Coad, Mrs. Mansfield, Sophie Edwin and Wilder. Stars and artists were numerous, there being James Stark, Jas. Murdock, Edwin Booth and Joe Booth.

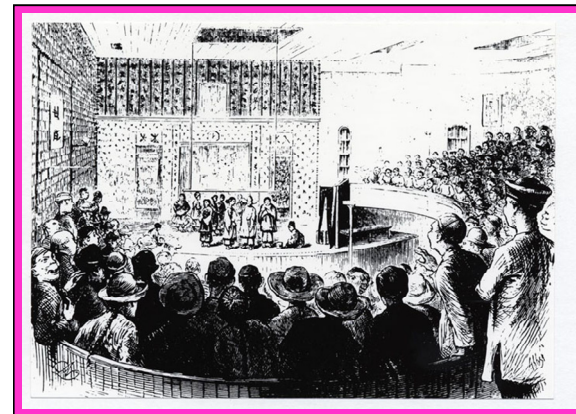
On July 14, 1852, a Switzer Band of musicians arrived from St. Louis- Fred Kraus, Jacob Mundwyler, Baltzar Mundwyler, John Baumann and Frank Bauer. Being a good band, they were immediately engaged at a gambling house on Pacific street wharf. Jacob Mundwyler was the father and Baltzar Mundwyler the uncle of our well known three brothers John, Louis and Fred Mundwyler who arrived in San Francisco with their mother in 1854.



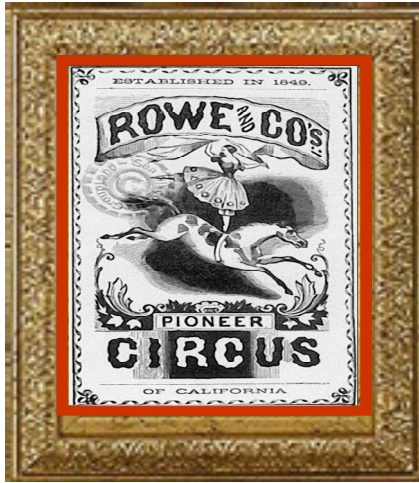
Edwin Booth as Hamlet,
Brother of John-Wilkes

... CHINA VISITORS

A very large China troupe appeared for one week at this theatre. They had a very costly outfit and wardrobe, scenery and a large Chinese orchestra. There were about one hundred people in the company and they all lived in the theatre, on the stage, under and over the stage, doing their own cooking. The regular orchestra only played one overture before the rise of the curtain and then we were at liberty to go or stay. After the performance had commenced, with the whole Chinese orchestra on the stage, the play would keep on for hours. The curtain only came down at the end of the play. The first two nights the business was good; but the rest of the week turned out bad. The white people did not take kindly to this sort of amusement. At that time there were very few Chinese, so the big troupe failed and all their rich costumes and everything were sold at a sheriff's sale.



On October 20, 1852 at the American Theatre, the 123-member Tung Hook Tong troupe presented the first classical Chinese Operas ever to be seen in America and the Western world.

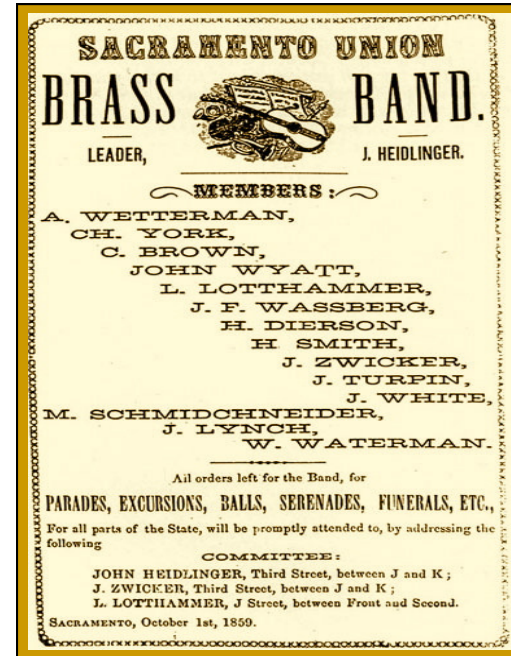


Courtesy: Jake Brouwer,
Land - Sea Discovery Group

Lee & Marshall's successful Gold Country tours made it possible for others to follow, like performer-owner Joseph Rowe and his "Pioneer Circus" in Placerville ("Hangtown") in 1856.

...1855 - THE CIRCUS COMES TO TOWN!

In April, 1855, I was offered a position as leader of the band of Lee and Marshall's circus. This gave me an opportunity to see most of the mining towns and camps as we went over the route twice during the season. Although we had a most excellent wagon, the band men preferred to walk rather than ride in the wagon during the hottest time and take in the dust. As soon as breakfast was over, we would start out on trails and take short cuts through the country. That gave us a chance to see a good deal of California's beautiful scenery.

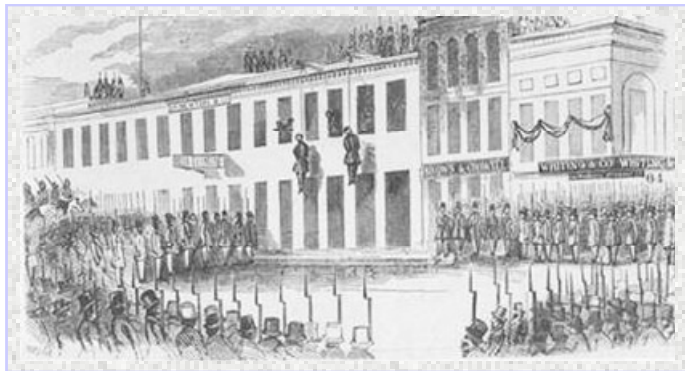


Band Advertisement

...THE SACRAMENTO UNION BRASS BAND

In 1856 the Sacramento Union Brass Band organized, all professional musicians and considered best in the state as regards ability and uniform. August Wetterman, musical director. The band was engaged by the Sacramento City Guard, Captain Baker (Baker and Hamilton), to go down to San Francisco to participate in the funeral of King of William, who was shot by James P. Casey. Arrived at Pacific street wharf, Captain W. P. Coleman, No. 1 head of the Vigilance Committee, met us on board the boat, wishing to know if we were friends of the Vigilance Committee. Our captain

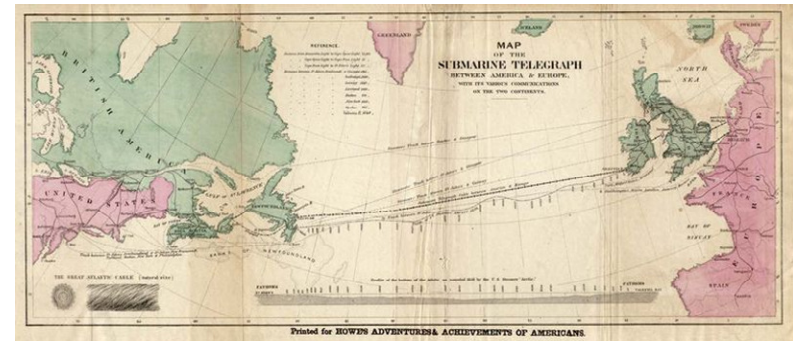
answered that we were all heart and soul with the Vigilance Committee. That being the case, he escorted us to their armory on the northeast corner of Kearney and Clay streets, where our company stacked arms and received orders for the day. The band and company marched to the Oriental Hotel at the junction of Market, Battery and Bush streets for lunch. Shortly after, we went for our position in the funeral parade. Order came, "No music!" it being the wish of Mrs. William. Every musician turned out with instrument reversed under his arm. When our company arrived at Stockton street at the corner of Sacramento street, the procession came to a halt. Our captain and officers had been let into the secret that Casey and Cora must hang before King of William was lowered into his grave. Through opera glasses which officers had along, we could see the two culprits dangle in the air outside Fort Vigilance on the south side of Sacramento street, between Front and Davis streets.



Lynching of James Casey and Charles Cora, 1856

THE ATLANTIC CABLE CELEBRATION

At the Atlantic Cable Celebration at San Francisco, The Sacramento City Guards engaged the Sacramento Union Brass Band to go with them to participate in the day parade and the torch light procession. The band in their splendid uniform and excellent playing had many admirers. The company kindly presented me with a beautiful sword in appreciation of our service. That took place August 16, 1858, when Queen Victoria sent the first message over the Atlantic cable to President James Buchanan, U.S.A.



The Atlantic Cable Route -1858

BIRTH OF A NEWSPAPER

In 1865, during a rehearsal at the Metropolitan Theatre on January 16, we were all presented with the first issue of the "Democratic Chronicle" by Mr. M. de Young. This was only a small four-page sheet containing programs of the then few theatres. In a few weeks it became larger and larger. It gave us the news of the day and became a feared

critic. In a few years it changed into the San Francisco Chronicle and is now the largest newspaper in California.



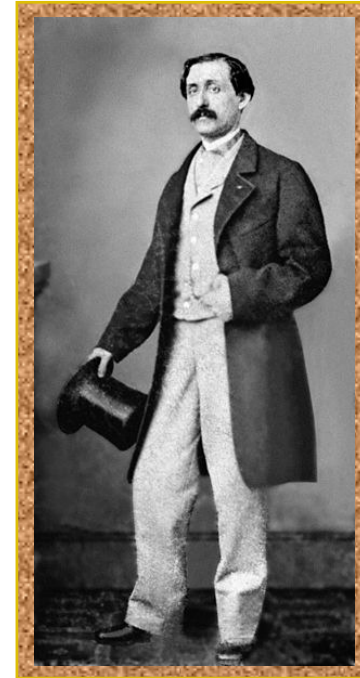
Established January, 1865 by Charles and Michael De Young
Samuel Clemens ("Mark Twain") was a regular contributor.

VISITING PIANIST HAS A NIGHT ON THE TOWN!

In 1867 Gottschalk, the piano virtuoso and composer also gave concerts at Platt's Hall and during his stay in San Francisco came together with a hatmaker, Lagee's son. They went to Oakland to have a good time - they hired buggies and took a drive to a female college. Two of the girls followed them through the night and returned to the college early in the morning. Oh! The young ladies away from their rooms had been discovered and the watch sat up awaiting their return in the morning, when they were hotly received. The college reputation was at stake, so the girls had to be punished. The story soon leaked out and the newspapers had columns of horrid things that happened. Gottschalk thought it best to leave San Francisco as soon as possible. He was a great pianist and composer.

I became well acquainted with one of those young ladies several years after this episode. She was

well married, had a splendid husband, and she herself was a most excellent lady.



Louis Moreau Gottschalk

THE GREAT 1865 EARTHQUAKE

In 1865 I met my friend Angelo Spadina for the first time at a rehearsal for a French performance at the American Theatre. The French company were able to draw full houses every Sunday before the Franco-German war. After the war their performances were very few on account of lack of patronage. At one Sunday morning rehearsal for the French company at the American Theatre we experienced a heavy earthquake. It looked to me as if

the roof opened right over the orchestra and shut again; for a moment it became very light. Spadina and myself picked up our instruments, ready to leave the theatre. This theatre was not considered safe for any performance and there was no theatre that evening. We had several quakes that day which did a great deal of damage. The worst earthquake that I have experienced, up to the eighteenth of April, 1906, came that day.

"A month afterward I enjoyed my first earthquake. It was one which was long called the "great" earthquake, and is doubtless so distinguished till this day. It was just after noon, on a bright October day. I was coming down Third street. The only objects in motion anywhere in sight in that thickly built and populous quarter, were a man in a buggy behind me, and a street car wending slowly up the cross street. Otherwise, all was solitude and a Sabbath stillness. As I turned the corner, around a frame house, there was a great rattle and jar, and it occurred to me that here was an item!—no doubt a fight in that house. Before I could turn and seek the door, there came a really terrific shock; the ground seemed to roll under me in waves, interrupted by a violent joggling up and down, and there was a heavy grinding noise as of brick houses rubbing together. I fell up against the frame house and hurt my elbow. I knew what it was, now, and from mere reportorial instinct, nothing else, took out my watch and noted the time of day; at that moment a third and still severer shock came, and as I reeled about on the pavement trying to keep my footing, I saw a sight! The entire front of a four-story brick building on Third street sprung outward like a door and fell sprawling across the street, raising a dust like a great volume of smoke! And here came the buggy—overboard went the man, and in less time than I can tell it the vehicle was distributed in small fragments along three hundred yards of street."

-- Mark Twain, Roughing It



Postal Card from Woodward's Gardens

...BEAUTIFUL WOODWARD'S GARDENS

1869- Woodward's Gardens, between Mission and Valencia streets, and now called Duboce (Thirteenth street) and Fifteenth streets, and with a tunnel running under Fourteenth street leading to the zoological gardens where all the live animals were kept, opened without music in 1866. In 1869 Mr. Woodward found it necessary to add some other attractions to his beautiful place and engaged the Third Artillery from the Presidio. After them Wetterman's band was engaged to furnish music. I started with a brass band. Afterwards I was allowed to increase and changed it into a reed band. Everyone was a soloist on their respective instruments.

...THE TERRIBLE EARTHQUAKE OF 1906

On April 18, 1906, at 4:45 a.m., the terrible catastrophe, the earthquake and fire, came. It was a great wonder that none of the old people were injured from the falling of bricks and plaster. We were most thankful to Eugene Schmitz, the city

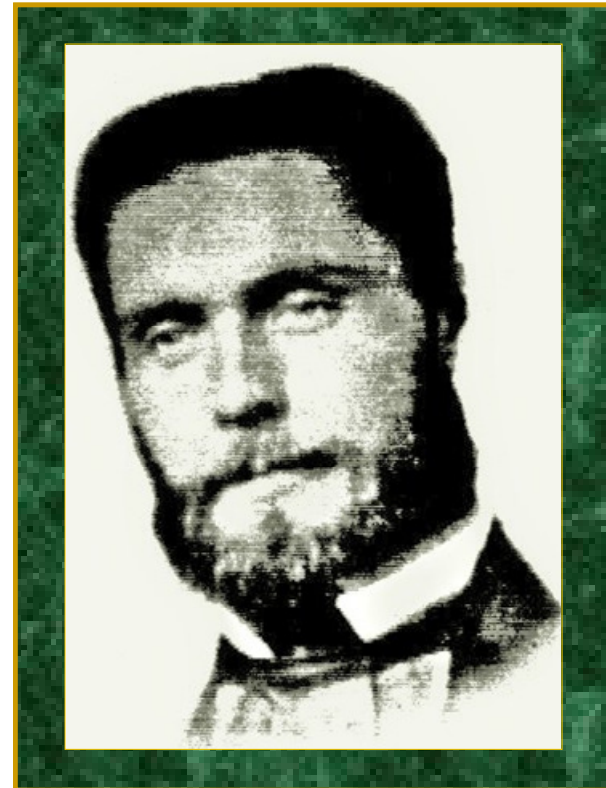
mayor, who so thoughtfully sent word to the Old People's Home that in case the fire should not be checked before it came too near our home he had made arrangements for us to go to the Presidio. Later in the afternoon the mayor sent word that it would not be necessary for us to go, as the fire was under control. Of course the Home was badly wrecked; all of the chimneys were down and all of the walls looked like chessboards. It cost \$10,000 for repairs. We were among the most fortunate in the city in that at no time were we in need of food or water nor were we obliged to stand in the bread line. The city government and the military authorities at Black Point and at the Presidio sent us wagonloads of all kinds of provisions every day. To them we could not be thankful enough for all of their kindness. The majority of the old people braved the shock pretty well, but some did not dare to stay in the house and thought it would be safer at the Alta Plaza and Hamilton Parks. Wife was not a bit afraid and we slept in our bed every night.



Aftermath of 1906 Earthquake

...AN 82ND BIRTHDAY SURPRISE!

On my eighty-second birthday, August 16, 1910, my granddaughter (son's daughter), Edna C. Wetterman, a graduate of Oakland High School and a graduated trained nurse from Los Angeles County Hospital, brought me a surprise by getting married to Dr. Rees Bynon Rees at Old People's Home chapel. These are now the only relatives I have left.



August Wetterman, "Gold Rush Maestro"