

The Gold Hill Merchant

Many early gold camps in Placer County sprang from nothing to become quite large settlements that flourished for a short time, and then disappeared. Gold Hill was one of those early camps. All that is left today is a beautiful little cemetery on a slight hill set amongst the bucolic rural landscape. Still tree studded and now dotted here and there with homes and pastures and the occasional goat herd, one can still envision the land as seen by the first miners in the area.

A group of miners from Georgia, who had been miners in their home state, first prospected in what would become Gold Hill in the spring of 1851.

1861 directory & Sacramento Daily Union April 30, 1852.

As with many of the dry diggings locations in the county, water or the lack of it, was the primary concern. The early miners quickly developed small ditches running from the near-by Auburn Ravine to the site of their claims "on the hill." The first was called the "Georgia" ditch and a subsequent one the "Ohio" ditch. The Sacramento Daily Union reported that in April 1852 "the Georgia Company have taken out \$42 to the man for ten days and many others are doing remarkably well. The dirt, principally washed in toms and sluices, is of a fine nature, it commands in market the highest premium."

Sacramento Daily Union April 30, 1852

The need for more water brought the creation of the Gold Hill and Bear River Ditch, incorporated in December of 1852. Its aim was to bring water from the Bear River. The ditch or canal was completed in 1853 and with the water a large mining population soon arrived at Gold Hill.

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GOLD HILL

The town quickly boasted the Gold Hill Hotel, the Union Hotel, the American Hotel, a Blacksmith's shop, a livery stable, a variety store, a butcher shop and slaughterhouse, a school, a Masonic Hall, Nagels Saloon, the Union Saloon, the El Dorado Saloon and at least one "bawdy house"

1861 Directory & Herald 11-24-1855 & Deed Book B pg. 176.

There were also several general merchandise shops. Among those was the shop of Emanuel Skall. Emanuel was unfortunate enough to have died in Gold Hill in April 1854. His probate is a fascinating look into the lives of miners in the prosperous little village.

Probate #25- Skall

The following is just a sampling of items taken from an extensive inventory of the goods in Emanuel's Shop at the time of his death. Explanations are given when deemed necessary.

- 5 large Carpet Bags
- 24 Leghorn Hats
- 22 Palm Leaf Hats
- 7 Feather Hats
- 1 dozen fine Excelsior Hats
- ½ dozen Beaver Hats

1 dozen black Empire Hats
3 silk glaze Hat Covers
1 ½ dozen assorted Pants
3 dozen Satinade Pants – twilled cotton-resembling denim
1 dozen Linen Pants
6 Plain satin Vests
4 figured silk Vests
½ dozen Nankeen Coats – yellowish brown cotton – quite indestructible
½ dozen Angola Coats
5 fine cloth Frock Coats
3 Black Frock Coats
12 pairs cowhide Shoes
12 assorted ladies Gaiters
4 pair India Rubber Boots
1 dozen Merino Socks
17 silk Handkerchiefs
1 box of Fiddle Strings
5 Bowie Knives
1 dozen check Shirts
15 boxes of Cigars
11 mixed Cravats
1 dozen buckskin Gloves
14 pieces of silk Ribbon
2 dozen Monte Carels – for the gambling game of Monte
9 dozen Playing Cards
1 box smoking Tobacco
14 pairs double soled calf Boots
7 pairs hip Boots
and my personal favorites
1 Gum Life Preserver
34 pairs of Patent Leather Shoes

Probate # 25 - Skall

We imagine the lives of the early miners to be fairly coarse and hardscrabble and hence the need for boots and sturdy coats but the above list shows just how stylish and cosmopolitan they were. Though it is hard to imagine what a miner in 1854 would do with patent leather shoes and the gum life preserver is just a plain mystery.

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