

# HASTINGS OF SACRAMENTO'S TRAGEDY-STAINED POLITICAL STRONGHOLD.



PHOTO BY BUSHNELL

THE FAMOUS  
RHOADS AND  
TOWNSEND  
HOUSE

WITHIN a stone's throw of each other and in the block between Front and Second on J street in Sacramento are two buildings in which in days long ago some of the most important political deals in California were made. Within their walls United States Senators and Congressmen, Governors and other State officers were made and unmade; fabulous sums of money were expended to corrupt members of Legislatures and of State conventions, and to carry elections. At their gorgeously fitted bars most of the prominent early day men of politics drank and in the side and upper rooms plotted and executed schemes that have left a lasting impress on the political history of the State and to a lesser extent on that of the nation. And in the annals of these old buildings are also pages of tragedies.

The old Magnolia saloon, on the north side of the street, about midway in the block, was for many years kept by old "Baldy" Johnson, the father of the present Sheriff of the county. The upstairs was arranged for lodging rooms, and in the "D's" place was the principal resort of the noted politicians of the State. Here, in 1857, the compromise was made between David C. Broderick and William M. Gwin whereby it was agreed by the former that Gwin would be permitted to be elected as his colleague in the United States Senate. Here Gwin penned the famous "secret letter," in which he abjectly agreed to surrender to Broderick all of the Federal patronage in case his ancient enemy would relent and allow him to be returned to the Senate. It was the violation of that compact, that brought on the bitter campaign of 1859 that culminated in the fatal duel between Broderick and David S. Terry. The glory of the old Magnolia passed away many years ago; its identity is now known to but a few, and it has long been used as part of a produce store.

At the southwest corner of Second and J streets is the famous Rhoads & Townsend House that for more than two decades until quite recently was a widely known political headquarters, but now, after a varied history extending back almost to the time of the admission of the State, it is about to lose its identity and to be transformed into an ordinary business house. Workmen are tearing out the interior to remodel it for offices and the Santa Fe Railroad Company and the Postal Telegraph Company.

The building that originally stood on the site was destroyed in the great fire of November 2, 1852—the day of the first Presidential election in California—when nearly the entire city was swept away. Whether this building was frame or brick and what its deviations were is not recorded, and the memory of the oldest inhabitant does not serve to throw light on the subject; but, according to local history, a portion of it was used as a city station-house in the days when a prison brig that was anchored in the river served as the county jail. Twice this station-house at Second and J streets yielded a victim to the fury of the mob in the early days when lynch law at times supplanted the duly constituted courts.

On the afternoon of February 24, 1850, a gambler named Frederick J. Roe and a miner quarreled at a game table in the Mansion House at the corner of Front and J streets. A bystander, Charles H. Myers, a blacksmith and a recent immigrant from Ohio, parted them, when Roe shot him in the brain for interfering. The wound was not immediately fatal, but was necessarily so. A large crowd soon collected and a people's meeting was organized. In the meantime Roe was taken by the officers to the station-house, and a number of speeches had been delivered, some urging that the prisoner be immediately taken out and hanged, and others pleading that he be referred to the regular courts, a jury was announced, all of whom accepted except Ferdinand C. Ewer, who stated that he was a newspaper man whose duty it was to make an unbiased report of the proceedings, which he could not do if he took an active participation. Ewer, by the way, afterward became a distinguished Episcopalian clergyman in the East. While the jury was deliberating violent speeches were addressed to the crowd and the excitement was terrific. From 2500 to 3000 people collected and, according to one report, "Second street from J to K was jammed, the windows on each side of Second and up J were crowded, the roofs of dwellings were covered and the porticoes and awning posts were occupied at every available point." About 8 o'clock p. m. it was announced that the jury had agreed, and the verdict was read from the Orleans Hotel balcony by P. B. Cornwall, the foreman, amid perfect silence from the people. The verdict recited the bald facts and contained no recommendation. It was signed by John H. Scrantom, John T. Bailey, W. F. Freetyman, Edward Cronin, J. H. Starr, D. O. Mills, H. G. Langley, T. B. Cornwall, A. M. Winn, George G. Wright, Harrison Olmstead and Levi Hermance. The jury was composed of leading citizens, and several of them afterward came into prominence. Mills is the head of the banking house of D. O. Mills & Co., the father-in-law of Whitelaw Reid, and is now a prominent citizen of New York. Langley was the publisher of the San Francisco directories for years. Cornwall was a member of the first Legislature and is well known in political and mercantile life. General Winn was the founder of the Order of Native Sons. As soon as the verdict was read J, K and Second streets rang with the loudest

cheering, and there was a general stampede for the station-house. Here efforts were made to conciliate the mob, but they were unavailing. Awning posts were pulled up and used as battering rams and the door of the station-house was beaten down. The officers were overpowered instantly.

Roe was chained in an inner cell and there was considerable difficulty in getting him unshackled, but as soon as it was accomplished he was taken to the big oak trees that then stood on Sixth street between K and L. A large part of the crowd immediately rushed to that point, but sufficient remained to form a large and unassailable guard which marched the prisoner to the trees, under one of which a temporary staging had already been erected, upon which the doomed man was placed, and Rev. M. C. Briggs sent for. The prisoner said that he had committed the deed, but in a fit of passion, and had nothing to say for himself; that he was 29 years of age, an Englishman by birth and that he had a mother and sister living in the old country. After the minister had performed his duties a rope was placed around the prisoner's neck, the other end thrown over one of the limbs of the tree and being seized by a multitude of strong hands, the prisoner was hanged in the presence of an estimated audience of 5000 people.

The next case of lynching occurred in 1851. On July 3 three men, William B. Robinson, James Gibson and John Thompson, in open daylight knocked down and robbed a farmer named James Wilson on L street, between Fourth and Fifth. The crime was witnessed and the offenders soon arrested. The news flew from man to man with the rapidity of the burning brand sent forth by a Scottish Thane when calling his clan to arms. Before 4 o'clock more than a thousand men surrounded the station-house. The crowd organized with Demas Strong in the chair. A jury of eleven was impaneled, but could not agree and asked for further time. It was then agreed by the County Judge that he would call a special court session for the following week. This was the first time that the defendants were legally convicted and sentenced to be hanged on August 22. Under the law at that time grand larceny was a capital offense. At dawn on the morning of the 22d people commenced coming into the city to witness the triple execution. In a few hours the town was crowded with people. Between 9 and 10 o'clock it was reported that Robinson had been reprieved by the Governor. As the report spread, stores after store and shop after shop was closed and by noon all business had ceased.

A meeting was organized in front of the Orleans Hotel on Second street and a large committee was appointed to see that the sentence of the court was carried into effect as well against Robinson as against his companions. The Stark Guard, fully armed but in firemen's dress, formed a hollow square in front of the station house. A wagon and the Sheriff, with a strong body of deputies, were in the center of the square. The three prisoners were brought out and Thompson and Gibson were placed in the wagon and it passed out toward the place of execution, at the old sycamore at Sixth and O streets. The Sheriff then directed the guards to close up and convey Robinson to the prison brig, but scarcely had they left the station house before their ranks were forced and the prisoner taken by the mob. No real resistance was offered by the soldiers. Another wagon was procured, the prisoner placed in it and it slowly followed to the place of execution. When the drop fell with the two men a cry arose from the crowd, "Now for Robinson! Bring him here and send him after the others!" A rush was made for the prison brig, for the crowd did not know what had occurred at the station house. Some one sprang upon the scaffold and shouted: "We've got Robinson! He's within a square of here and will be brought up as soon as the others are cut down!" During the lull caused by this speech the muffled drums of the Stark Guard beating the "Dead March" were heard advancing, and the Sheriff and his deputies, knowing that resistance was useless, retired. Robinson was placed upon the scaffold, remaining to the end calm. He made an earnest and effective speech that produced a favorable sentiment among many in the crowd, but the majority demanded his life, and it was taken.

After the great 1852 fire the lot remained vacant until October, 1853, when it was sold to the banking firm of B. F. Hastings & Co. for \$1000, and the present brick building was erected—a two-story structure fronting 40 feet on J street and 80 on Second. The lower floor was divided into four rooms. The one on the corner was used by the bank, the one to the west on J street by L and S. Wormser, clothing merchants, and the two on Second street by Wells, Fargo & Co., express office and Herzog & Co., clothing merchants. The Legislature had passed a law that the sessions of the State Supreme Court should be held at the seat of government, and it was located in rooms in the upper story of the building, as was also the State Library. And there the highest tribunal in California held its sessions continuously from 1854 down to 1868, when the present State Capitol was completed. While the court was held in the building at Second and J streets the following justices presided: Solomon Heydenfeldt, Peter H. Burnett, Stephen J. Field, E. B. Crocker, Alexander Wells, Charles H. Bryan, David S. Terry, W. W. Cope, Hugh C. Murray, Joseph G. Baldwin, Edward Norton, Oscar L. Shafter, Lorenzo Sawyer, Silas W. Sanderson, John Curry, A. L. Rhodes, Royal T. Sprague, William T. Wallace and J. B. Crockett.

The banking house of B. F. Hastings & Co. was established in Sacramento at a very early day and at the time of the construction of the building and for years afterward was regarded as one of the



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soundest financial institutions in the State. And it had a connection with an interesting early day episode of California history. When the American or "Know Nothing" party swept the State in 1855 Dr. Henry Bates was elected Treasurer and his office was in what is now the Sheriff's office in the Courthouse, then the State Capitol. E. A. Rowe, the Deputy Treasurer, practically had charge of the business of the department. The interest on the State bonds was payable in New York and the amount for the liquidation of the semi-annual installment of July, 1856—\$8,520—was withdrawn from the treasury in April and turned over to the bank of Palmer, Cook & Co. of San Francisco for transmission to the East, but it never reached its destination. The Legislature of 1857 instituted an investigation and it developed that something like \$200,000 in all had been taken from the treasury without any warrant from the Controller. Rowe refused to answer any questions concerning the missing money

and was imprisoned for contempt. Aside from the \$8,520 the Legislature never found the slightest trace of what became of the money except from the statement by the officers of the Hastings Bank that during the excitement over the Vigilance Committee in San Francisco in 1856 Rowe had represented that there was danger that a raid would be made upon the State treasury; that one night a number of bags of gold were quietly passed out of the window of the treasury office, loaded in a wagon and deposited in the vault of the Hastings Bank, but where they went to there never developed.

Bates was impeached, resigned his office before trial and the Legislature disqualified him from ever again holding office. Actions were brought against him and his bondsmen, but the State never recovered a dollar of the enormous sum that was abstracted.

At noon on November 1, 1871, the doors of the banking house of B. F. Hastings & Co. were closed, never again to be

opened for the transaction of business. This laconic explanation was all that was conveyed to the depositors by a note that was posted on the door: "In consequence of the news received from San Francisco that John Sims & Co., with whom this house is closely connected, could not open to-day, we are compelled to close this office." The announcement created a flurry, but the depositors lost everything. And so the old building lost caste—it was no longer the seat of the judicial power of the State or the home of a flourishing fiscal institution.

For a time it was distinguished by to let signs and then the lower portion was rented to a produce firm and its floors were littered with cabbages, onions, potatoes and other truck; the upper part was cut up into lodging rooms.

But the old building was destined to recoup and to again take a position of importance in the public affairs of the State. A. J. Rhoads, familiarly and popularly known as "Frank Rhoads," and Isador

Townsend had for several years conducted the Union Hotel, an old-time and well-known resort near the other end of the block on Second street. The partnership broke up over a little misunderstanding in which Rhoads shot his associate in the leg, but the wound was not serious, nor was the estrangement of the men of long duration. They again joined, leased the old bank building, christened it the "Rhoads & Townsend House," and by that name it has since been known over the State and beyond. The partners were of different political faiths; Rhoads ran the Republican and Townsend the Democratic end of politics.

A couple of smaller rooms in the rear were fitted up for card tables and places for private consultation. The old bank vault was made a storage room for liquors and cigars. Upstairs the rooms were used for gambling games and for sleeping quarters. The old building again became the scene of constant activity. It was the mecca to which politicians of all parties

journeyed. It was the meeting place of central committees. The First Ward was the principal battleground in the primary and other elections and the Rhoads & Townsend House was the depository of the coin for the influencing of the voters and the place at which it was disbursed. And sometimes the sack was so handily accessible as to be almost free to the gambler. At one election for Chief of Police—as one of importance to the gambling element particularly—the Rhoads & Townsend House was the depository of the coin for the influencing of the voters and the place at which it was disbursed. And sometimes the sack was so handily accessible as to be almost free to the gambler. At one election for Chief of Police—as one of importance to the gambling element particularly—the Rhoads & Townsend House was the depository of the coin for the influencing of the voters and the place at which it was disbursed. And sometimes the sack was so handily accessible as to be almost free to the gambler. 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