

GOLD RUSH ENTREPRENEUR MICHAEL HAROLD POWER

by Bill Wilson

Michael Harold Power, one of the many Irishmen who Placer County's gold country in the 1850's, found rich mines and made the most of it.

Power set a pattern for gold recovery and became a principal in the development of the once thriving (now ghost town) communities of Damascus and Sunny South. His business acumen as an executive with the Mountain Gate Mining Company and the Hidden Treasure Mining Company also brought big dividends to the firms' investors.

Following in the paths of his ancestors in the British Isles, Power found the time and space to enter politics, and if he had not personally been defeated in a contest for the State Senate he might have climbed the political ladder to the very top. He began his political life as a Douglas Democrat, but during the Civil War he became a friend of the North and changed his party affiliation to Republican.

Power did serve as a county supervisor after the 1867 election and went on to represent Placer County in the Assembly two years later after his popularity soared as a public servant. He was nominated for the State Senate in 1873, but when a coalition of Democrats and liberal

Republicans, all aligned with railroad interests, formed an independent party known as the "Dolly Vardens," Power lost out by some 50 votes to the "Varden" choice, Dr. Noble Martin, a 35-year-old candidate.

Although his supporters regularly bombarded him with requests to run again for political office, he invariably declined to do so. He was content to

spend his energy and interest mining the rich quartz and gravel in an area that is all but forgotten by those who followed him.

Power arrived in Iowa Hill in 1854 where he helped survey for a toll road from Iowa Hill to Illinoistown. But gold, gold, gold, lured him into mining and he moved to Damascus and bought interest in the Mountain Tunnel Mine, and he participated in the consolidation of the Golden Gate Mine to form the Mountain Gate Mining Company. He spent 20 years with the Mountain Gate operation and saw the mining venture strike the rich blue gravel channel that yielded thousands of dollars a month in gold.

It was not too long after he arrived in Placer County and capitalized in gold mining that he sent passage money for his betrothed, Isaline M. Keysner Develey of New York, who had been a governess with the Crocker family in New York. She sailed west in 1855 and crossed the Isthmus of Panama by mule and then boarded another ship to reach San Francisco where Power met his bride and they were married in the Mission Dolores.

While he was associated with the Mountain Gate, there were 21 shares in the mine, with the shares being sold from \$35,000 to \$40,000 each during the peak production periods of the company according to *Thompson & West's History of Placer County*.

Power, although a successful mining investor with Mountain Gate, turned his interest to the Hidden Treasure Mine, which he had mapped out with William Cameron in January, 1870. Cameron had been a share-owner of the Mountain Gate, and the two had plotted the course of the rich gravel channel that led into Blacksmith Canyon, a tiny tributary of El Dorado Canyon. Mrs. Power was credited with naming the new mine.

The mining venture turned out to be a bonanza, and when shafts



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M. M. H. Powers

I like to inform you that I have transferred my claim to the Mountain Gate Mining Company to Richard W. Cole

of sending family m

William

A transfer of a claim in the Mountain Gate Mining Company. H. Power, a company executive, on stationery from a San Francisco hotel.

were sunk into the channel and the gravel hauled out in carts by mules. Cameron and Power and the other investors reaped great benefits. Eager to increase production, the two majority owners ordered a locomotive engine from Philadelphia to transport the gravel out of the mine for processing.

Shares in the the mine were bought and traded in rapid succession, and Power and Cameron oversaw the transactions. George W. Snyder, secretary and bookkeeper for the mining venture and a justice of the peace in Damascus, recorded some 85 notices of transfers of half and



The gold-mining town of Sunny Side east of Foresthill prospered for several decades when Michael H. Power was influential in the operation of the Mountain Gate Mining Company. Photo courtesy of Power Mansion Inn.

full shares in the Mt. Gate Mining Company from 1860 to 1885. Snyder is the great-great grandfather of William "Bill" Griffith of Auburn, who has some of the Mountain Gate's old invoices and financial records.

Snyder's records also showed that during a period from September 14 to November 18 in 1865, gold dealer Edwin Tyler of Michigan Bluff purchased some 578 ounces of gold for \$10,986 (at between \$17.50 and \$18 an ounce) from the mining company, although it is not known if all of the gold came from the same mine.

But water intrusion into the workings of the Mountain Gate created