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summary

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OLD TOWN OF SHASTA

(By Lois Ann Woodward)

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Shasta City, 1,169 feet up in the foothills of the Sacramento Valley, seven miles northwest of Redding, is the oldest town of Northern California. It was originally known as Reading's Springs. In 1849, gold was discovered in Shasta County by prospectors who had mined the previous year on the American and Feather rivers. Major Pierson B. Reading, early settler of Shasta, aided by Indians and others worked the mines near the site of Reading's Springs or Reading's Dry Diggings, as their camp was called. Before the end of 1849 gold was found on Cottonwood, Clear Creek, Whiskey Creek and French Gulch. In the heart of that vicinity's richest mining district, Shasta City became a favorite settlement. It is now rapidly becoming one of California's "ghost towns."

On June 8, 1850, the name of the camp was changed from Reading's Springs to Shasta City in honor of the snow capped mountain to the north. The following year the county seat was transferred from Reading's Ranch on the southern border to Shasta City, more centrally located and the most important town in the county.

Shasta City's best years were from 1850-1857. As there were no wagon roads over the mountains to the northern

mines, Shasta became an important supply base and distributing center for the northern camps. Freight was transferred from wagons to pack mules, which were used to transport provisions over the steep wooded trails of the Trinities and Siskiyou. The wholesale houses did an enormous business, and trade in all lines was good. Daily more prospectors flocked into Shasta, which came to have a population of several thousand.

After 1857, good graded mountain roads were built to Trinity County and Yreka. After 1857, the mines although not exhausted had been well worked over. Trade decreased. Men went to new fields or returned to their old occupations. Some of the pioneers stayed on and engaged in agriculture. The land was fertile, water plentiful and the climate excellent for many crops.

In 1890, the California-Oregon railroad was routed through Redding, seven miles east, drawing from Shasta City what little trade remained after the gold rush ended. The center of the county's interest shifted to Redding and the county seat was removed then from Shasta.

Today, the prosperous mining town, whose population in the 1850's numbered among the thousands, is only a few hundred. Except for its crumbling old buildings, in appearance Old Shasta remains little changed from the mining town of the 1850's. A few of the better preserved of the old brick buildings are still in use.