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TUTTLETOWN

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TUTTLETOWN

Tuttletown is south of the Calaveras River and near the Stanislaus, six miles west of Sonora and three miles from Jamestown, upon what is known as Mormon Creek. The town lies in a little valley with famous old Jackass Hill at its back. It had for its neighbors other diggings such as Angels Camp, Murphy's, Douglas Flat, Shaw's Flat, Brown's Flat, Carson's, Vallecito and Columbia, with Sonora the center of activity and source of supplies for all of that region.

The early mining camps derived their names either from some event in their early history or from the man responsible for their founding. Jackass Hill was so named because a prospector in search of his strayed pack animal discovered rich deposits of gold in the locality; Tuttletown received its name from its founder, Judge Anson A. H. Tuttle.

Anson Tuttle pitched his tent on Mormon Gulch toward the end of the summer of 1848, then stripped bark from the young pines and built a log cabin. His was the first cabin in Tuolumne County, though he was not first on the ground at Mormon Creek. Gold was discovered on the creek

in 1848, and large quantities were taken from its placer diggings. When Tuttle, who afterwards was Tuolumne County's first judge, settled on the creek in 1848, he found Mexicans mining there and living in their brush houses, or remadas. Amid the surrounding remadas, Anson Tuttle's one-room residence loomed like a palace, and, being Tuolumne's first attempt at pretentious architecture, it became the nucleus of a village.[1]

Tuttletown, like all the early camps, was settled only on account of its placer deposits. In the course of the years, rich quartz veins were discovered in the neighborhood, permanent investments were made, and Tuttletown continued for some years to be an active mining town.

Jackass Hill, a mile or so farther along the old Milton Road, was discovered at approximately the same time as Tuttletown, near the end of the summer of 1848, and immediately took first rank. Tuttletown and its neighbor, Jackass Hill, are so connected in association and so close together geographically that they are often referred to indiscriminately. It is difficult to ascertain, from the brief writings of those who have visited these old camps, which of the two is meant. The San Francisco Alta of May

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1. E. B. Buckbee, The saga of old Tuolumne, 19.

29, 1867, reprinted a letter from Sonora in which a miner was reported interested in a quartz claim near Tuttletown. The writer of the letter stated that the claim was really on Jackass Hill, but "Tuttletown sounded more sentimental."

At the beginning, the gold found on Jackass Hill was extremely coarse. Nuggets which weighed several ounces were reported as daily finds. Two of the men who first mined in that locality, a Major Means and his brother, Julius, obtained an amount variously estimated at from ten to sixteen thousand dollars from a claim one hundred feet square.[2] That rich gulch was not limited to placer ground alone, for the brothers discovered, in the course of their placer mining, a quartz vein. Some of the specimens taken from the ledge are said to have yielded nearly two-thirds gold. Dozens of other claims were reported to have yielded equally as well. The Carrington claim produced for its discoverer one hundred to three hundred dollars per day. The process was a simple pounding of the rock with an iron mortar.[3]

Tuttletown and Jackass Hill were noted for rich segregations of gold in the quartz, or pockets. Pocket and coyote-hole mining are peculiar to that region. In that

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2. Buckbee, The saga of old Tuolumne, 19.
3. Z. S. Eldredge, History of California, III, 339-340.

area, five miles north of Sonora, much gold has been produced. Here, quartz mines, also, were developed at an early date. Miners followed leads and encountered gold-banded ribbon rock. At Jackass Hill the most successful mining had been pocket mining, large returns being almost always assured where that method was used.

In 1852, a negro, named Moses Dinks, started from his cabin between Jackass Hill and Tuttletown, for Hawkins Bar on the Tuolumne. Within sight of Shaw's Flat, at the base of Table Mountain, the negro found a thirty-five pound chunk of golden quartz exposed to view.[4] Unable to carry so much gold at the time and unwilling to turn back to his cabin, he buried his find on the spot, and continued on his way. At the end of three weeks he returned and was much worried to find a group of Italians working the ground where his find lay buried. The Italians had missed his gold by two feet.

In 1885, William Swerer and four other Germans were re-working an old claim on Jackass Gulch and found the yield poor. One of the men, in trying to find where the pay dirt lay, sunk a few holes in the bank and in one of the holes, close to the cabin door, found a vein of decomposed quartz. The miners could not understand what to

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4. Buckbee, The saga of old Tuolumne, 329.

them was a new formation and asked a Colonel Ingersoll, prominent citizen of Sonora who happened to be in the vicinity, to look at it. Colonel Ingersoll, after the first glance, offered the partners four hundred dollars for a fifth interest in the claim. Under the direction of the colonel, they worked the seam and in the week following took out one hundred and seventy pounds of gold.[5]

The early placer miners of California, in the absence of federal legislation, and California not being then a State, found themselves with no recourse but to draw up their own laws and regulations in their several districts. These laws were intelligently framed, and enforced by the miners themselves. While differing in details, the regulations of the different districts agreed as to certain matters, such as the number of feet of mining ground a miner might claim, and forfeiture through non-working of the claim. The miners of Tuttletown, like, those of other districts, had their own code of laws as early as 1849.[6] No gold-worker, the miners' code held, was permitted to hold more than two claims, either by purchase or otherwise, and no man's claim was ever forfeited in case of illness in the Tuttletown district.

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5. Buckbee, The saga of old Tuolumne, 330.
6. Ibid., 329.

Frank Marryat, an Englishman, arrived at Tuttletown, with the object of testing the value of the quartz veins there. If, with the assistance of the miners he had engaged, he found the veins to hold sufficient promise of remuneration, it had been agreed between him and a friend in San Francisco that sufficient machinery should be brought to Tuttletown to give the ore a fair trial. The details of his experimenting with Tuttletown ore, together with a description of Tuttletown life, are given by Mr. Marryat in his book, Mountains and Molehills, published in New York in 1855.

Proceeding on horseback in company with one Joe Bellow and an engineer, crossing Table Mountain, the party arrived at Tuttletown, finding the Tuttletonians not actively engaged at the time, principally because the diggings had given out. Soon, the party were comfortably settled and actively employed. The vein extended for half a mile, and the three spots selected for exploration had each its band of men ainking a prospecting shaft. Marryat relates:[7]

> With windlasses and buckets, crowbar and drills, gunpowder and fuse, matches, pestles, mortars, retorts and quicksilver, we each of us had our occupation, and were happy as the day was long. The quartz was sharp and cut like glass, so we wore deerskin 'trouserloons,' our beards grew, our muscles increased to an alarming extent, our

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7. F. Marryat, Mountains and molehills,

> manners were less toned down than usual... we were so happy that even the pleasures of the 'little valley' fell into insignificance before those of our Tuttletonian life; and this arose in a great measure from the fact that we all entertained a strong belief that one day or other our labors would be rewarded.

The diggings in Tuttletown were not worked actively while there was insufficient water. This was soon to be remedied, for companies of miners were at work in every direction, diverting water from the river to the dry diggings; and, Marryat wrote, new plots of auriferous ground were added to the area of "paying ground" daily by artificial introduction of the water which nature had denied to them.

On June 21, 1851, the Tuttletown miners held a meeting for the purpose of taking measures to survey a ditch to convey water from the South Fork of the Stanislaus River into Columbia and nearby camps. The chairman of the meeting was Joseph Dance, formerly of Alabama, and J. D. Patterson, of Columbia, was secretary. A committee was appointed to survey the route. The members of the committee were General Bernard, a civil engineer; J. D. Patterson, of Columbia, and Judge W. H. Carlton. The committee soon found a satisfactory route and the Tuolumne County Water Company,[8] with twenty-one members, was organized at Tuttle-

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8. Buckbee, The saga of old Tuolumne, 265.

town, with Mr. Dance as president.8 A five dollar assessment for each member was levied. The Tuolumne County Water Company was organized to meet the chief need of the placer miner - a convenient and abundant supply of water. The winter rains could not be relied upon and since there was very little water - at times, none - work in the mines was often at a standstill.

In the course of three months, the Marryat party had collected two or three hundred tons of Tuttletown ore. Daily tests having borne out earlier opinions of the value of the mines, Marryat proceeded to San Francisco to obtain the machinery and steam power needed for a trial of the ore which had been mined. He returned to Tuttletown with an eight-horse power steam engine and a newly invented machine which had not yet seen service in the mines. With sixteen yoke of oxen, the heavy machinery was planted finally in Tuttletown, after much labor and hardship in crossing Table Mountain. In Tuttletown, the machinery caused great excitement and the town increased in size and importance on account of it.

A French baker and a butcher at that time established themselves in business in Tuttletown's main street. A justice of the peace and constable were legally elected

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9. Marryat, Mountains and molehills, 290.

at the first general election. A carpenter, of good education, became justice of the peace, and one of the Marryat party, Rowe, performed the duties of constable. "Whenever," wrote Marryat, "we saw Rowe buckling on his pistols in a decisive manner preparatory to a start, we knew that he was proceeding to collect a debt due to some Tuttletonian, and this active constable invariably brought back either the money or the man."

Although the small Tuttletown population was peaceful enough, the carpenter justice of the peace "had ample employment from the surrounding mines and dispensed a great amount of justice in a very firm but off-hand manner." The Tuttletown miners showed much respect for the impartiality of the newly elected justice and his decisions in all disputes which came before him were received with satisfaction everywhere. Marryat related:

> One evening as our 'judge' was putting the finishing touch to a shanty he had been engaged in repairing a messenger informed him that a murder had just been committed at an adjacent digging; the judge thereupon threw down his hammer, and, after taking the depositions, issued a warrant for the arrest of the murderer, who was a well known desperado. Constable Rowe was to serve the warrant and capture the delinquent; consequently the whole population of Tuttletown (about fifteen) armed themselves to protect Rowe, and accompanied him to the diggings in question. Arrived there, the accused was found to have intrenched

himself in his house, with desperate intentions of firing his revolver at the law in whatever form it might summon him. I was not sorry to find on our arrival that he had abandoned this design, and surrendered himself at discretion, so we marched him off to Tuttletown. The judge heard all that was to be said, and that was sufficient for the committal of the prisoner to the jail at Sonora to await a trial; so we mounted our horses, took him at once into the town, and had him locked up.

Tuttletown itself seems to have been a very peaceful little group of miners, and all of the disturbances which were settled by the carpenter-judge seem to have occurred in the surrounding region. Occasionally, the Tuttletonians had to deal with an unwelcome visitor, as in the case of "Cut-throat Jack" who insisted on spending the night in the Marryat shanty. Marryat wrote, of that incident:

> There was a fierce brute of a man who often visited our camp, who was known to have committed a cold-blooded murder, although the law had acquitted him. He was called 'Cut-throat Jack,' nor did he object to the appellation; he was more feared in the mines than I should have supposed any man to have been, but he was always in a reckless, half-drunken state, and those who preferred to avoid a deadly quarrel would leave any house he entered.
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> One night as Thomas was watching a stack-fire near the tent, in which a mass of quartz was being purposely brought to a white heat for experimental purposes, Cut-throat Jack swaggered up to him, and informed him that he intended to pass the night in our shanty

(Rowe and I being in Sonora). To this Thomas objected, upon which Cut-throat made such a war-like demonstration that Thomas very properly knocked him down. 'Jack' unfortunately fell on the red-hot quartz, and the sensation was so new to him that, as soon as he could withdraw himself, he drew neither pistol nor knife, but was instantly lost to sight in the surrounding gloom, and never swaggered into our camp again from that night forth.

In the immediate neighborhood of Tuttletown there were three classes of miners - Mexican, French, and Chinese.

The Mexicans were in the habit of working their claims during the night and early morning, and devoting the day to sleeping and gambling. The evening, it seems, they devoted to a fandango or other amusement.

The French, among them many Parisians, worked quietly and steadily, unless emotionally aroused by news of their beloved France. A strange Frenchman appearing in camp, or an old copy of the Moniteur reaching them generally resulted in digging being suspended for the day and the entire group spending the time in discussion.

The Chinese presented a contrast to the lazy Mexican and the happy Frenchman. The Chinese usually arose early, sometimes neglecting to wash his face in his hurry to be at his work. Marryat wrote:

> No laugh proceeds from his lantern jaws, but his thoughts are steadily bent on the pursuit before him; if ever he chuckles, it must be in-

> inwardly to think how fast he is putting by the nice gold, and how cheaply he is living every day upon six pennyworth of rice and salt worms, while those around him are gambling away their substance.
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> When a couple of Chinese dispute over the right to a claim, the noise and gesticulations are frightful; arms (corporeal) are elevated on all sides; fingers are extended in indications of numbers, days, or dates, while each disputant being supported by his friends, all talk at once so rapidly, that the wonder is how they can sustain the altercation, and it is only when breath is exhausted on all sides that the argument is at last made comprehensible... further than making a dreadful uproar, no harm came from these recontres.

Marryat's group seems to have made the mistake of most of the early quartz miners, in bringing over the mountains machinery so ill adapted to the work it was to do, and so impracticable, that it soon broke down and was abandoned. The crusher which Marryat erected broke down beyond repair and he left Tuttletown for San Francisco, there to "prepare machinery that should grind and scrunch with a vigor nothing could resist." Marryat never returned to Tuttletown, but we are indebted to him for his picture of that old mining camp and mining as it was actually carried on there in the early 1850's.

Tuttletown, in the early days, had its full share of crimes. Swift punishment invariably followed and occasionally Lynch Law carried the day. An old pioneer living within

a stone's throw of Anson A. H. Tuttle's first diggings, speaking of the hanging of two men at a place hearby, was asked if the men were murderers. "Worse than that," he replied. "We caught them robbing our sluice-boxes."

In 1852, a miner was shot and killed on Moore's Flat, between Quartz and Moore's Run, near Tuttletown. Four or five dollars in silver and about one hundred dollars in gold dust were taken from the body. This seems to have been a robbery and murder of the kind so prevalent in all of the mining districts in the first few years of the gold excitement.[10]

On the night of June 21, 1855, Chapparita, a daring outlaw who had been a spotter in Murietta's band, in company with two other Mexicans entered the store of William Swerer and his partner, Judge John Bronson, in Tuttletown. The three men asked for whiskey and, Judge Bronson having retired for the night, Mr. Swerer waited upon them. One of the desperadoes felled Swerer with a blow, from his pistol, on the back of the head. Bronson, awakened by the noise, left his bunk in the loft and hurried down the ladder to the aid of his partner. Before he could reach Swerer, Bronson was shot and critically wounded. Paul Branagan, asleep in a nearby cabin, heard the noise of the revolvers and rushed

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10. Alta California, San Francisco, December 24, 1852.

for the store, but he too was fired upon and dangerously wounded. Leaving the three highly respected citizens of Tuttletown helpless, the desperados fled. The sheriff, Major Perrin L. Solomon, stated that the attack seemed to have been made for no other purpose than the gratification of the bloodthirsty ruffians.[11]

Tuttletown, before the railroad era, was a busy place. Two daily stages, one from Milton and one from Angels Camp, passed through the town, bringing the United States mail and Wells, Fargo and Company's express.[12] There, at Tuttletown, the passengers stopped for dinner at the Gross Hotel, an hostelry famous for Southern biscuit and chicken dinners.

Further along the old Milton Road, then the terminus of the Southern Pacific Railroad, Black Bart, the famous road agent, exacted tribute of Wells, Fargo and Company's treasure safe, and other bandits held up the stages on Funck Hill and nearly always made a successful haul.[13] Many raids on the road were made by Black Bart, but his last robbery was his downfall. The theft of the Patterson mine gold brick worth 5,000 dollars resulted in his imprisonment. That was

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11. Buckbee, The saga of old Tuolumne, 331.
12. The Progressive Association, Sonora, Tuolumne County, 88.
13. Ibid., 88.

his twenty-ninth holdup, the previous twenty-eight having been successful and remunerative.

Few refined women were to be found anywhere in the mining region in the first two hectic years of the gold rush; but the early day miner in most cases never forgot the women of his family "back home" and sometimes a very small reminder was sufficient to turn his thoughts to the comforts and refinements of the life he had left behind.

Tuttletown, in 1851, was one of the camps in which there were no women. In that year, a Tuttletown miner managed to obtain in some manner a lady's boot, small and well made, with which he used to tantalize his fellow miners. He would hold the boot up before an interested crowd and listen with satisfaction to the appreciative comments and offers to purchase. This exhibition he brought to a close with the remark, "Now, see here, boys - the chunk a'in't found that can buy this boot. 'Taint for sale - no how!"[14]

In Tuttletown of the present are to be found the "Brete Harte Store" and the "Mark Twain Oak." The tree enjoys as great celebrity as does the Charter Oak in the New England States, not because of its beauty or size, but because it was the favorite retreat from the sun's rays of Mark Twain when he resided at Jackass Hill as guest of

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14. Marryat, Mountains and molehills, 262-263.

Steve and Jim Gillis.[15] At that period literary genius had no commercial value in Tuttletown and Sam Clemens showed such an instinctive horror of manual labor that he found it necessary to live with someone who was willing to supply his needs. The Gillis brothers undertook the duty, and named the tree after their guest.

In the vicinity of the tree is seen the old store at Tuttletown. As early as 1852, William Swerer conducted a store in the town, a frame building on the opposite side of the street from the later stone store, built by wandering German stone masons in 1854.[16] The store carried a full stock of merchandise such as groceries, boots and shoes, clothing and mining supplies. It was the store in which Bret Harte was said to have clerked. There, according to tales of the period, Mark Twain lingered and swapped stories while living at Jackass Hill.[17] The store is now recognized as one of the most picturesque landmarks in all the mountains.

In Tuttletown, the visitor will probably be informed that Bret Harte slept in the old Tuttletown Hotel, and on the Slumgullion Road, referred to in Bret Harte's "Idol of Red Gulch," places are pointed out as settings of famous tales - Poverty Flat, Sandy Bar, Poker Flat, and so on. Bret Harte

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15. Union Democrat, Tuolumne County, Sonora, 1909.
16. A. Drury, California: an intimate guide, 432-433.
17. Ibid.

adapted names to scenes with the freedom of an artist and it is not of vital importance that he may have called Melones "Roaring Camp," or located "Poker Flat" in Tuolumne County rather than Plumas or Sierra, or placed "Two Men of Sandy Bar" upon the Stanislaus instead of the Mokelumne River.

A group of young men sat in the Tuttletown store often during the winter of 1863-64, swapping yarns. These young men, known by the names of Sam, Bret, Dan, Josh, Bill, Prent, John, Tom, Dick, Steve, Jim and Billy, were famous story tellers of the district. Prentice Mulford used to stop at Bill Swerer's store to pick up items for his paper, the Sonora Union Democrat, for which he wrote under the name "Dogberry."[18] Prentice Mulford or "Dogberry" was often found in Tuttletown with his friend, Captain Thomas Stoddard, also a writer, who used the nom de plume of "Cosmorama." Judge Ridge, a Cherokee, used for a pen name his own Indian name of Yellowbird. Ridge traveled up and down the Mother Lode, reporting gold strikes for the Golden Era, San Francisco's popular weekly.[19] Ridge, who was known in the West as a poet, may have gathered his material in the Tuttletown store for his book, "Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murietta," published in San Francisco in 1854.

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18. Buckbee, The saga of old Tuolumne, 328.
19. Ibid.

Jackass Hill was a sociable place, with intelligent and somewhat eccentric inhabitants. In the early days, Richard Stoker kept a menagerie on the hill, and this animal lover had among his pets a "learned" pig, several dogs, a billy goat, a large cat named "Tom Quartz," a spotted calf, a fox, two oppossums, a pole-cat, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks and a bluejay. These animals and birds lived contentedly together, and were taught many tricks by Mr. Stoker in his leisure hours. The pig seems to have been the prize pupil, being able to balance on its snout or walk on its hind legs. Sam Clemens was much interested in Mr. Stoker's bluejay, and wrote a story about the cat, "Tom Quartz." The "Gold Hunter Cat" of Mark Twain soon became famous.

Stephen and James Gillis, with Richard Stoker, lived in a cabin which had once been Tom Carrington's. The lumber for it, which had been shipped around Cape Horn, had been hauled to Tuttletown by mule team, and Mexican peons packed it up Jackass Hill on their backs. Richard Stoker and James Gillis were always present to look after the mining properties which they and Stephen Gillis owned in common. The duplicate of the Gillis cabin is now called the Mark Twain Cabin. It occupies the site of the old shack and was rebuilt through the generosity of Mr. W. J. Loring,[20] a

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20. Mrs. R. Thom, Memories of days of old, 7.

noted mining engineer. On June 17, 1922, the cabin was dedicated to the memory of Mark Twain, about two thousand people attending the ceremonies.[21] William Gillis, Mark Twain's old-time friend, was chairman, and told anecdotes of Mark Twain's stay with him at the cabin, and ex-Governor Stephens was one of the principal speakers.

In his life of Bret Harte, Henry Childs Merwin states that in 1856 or "thereabouts," Bret Harte was teaching school "at Tuttletown, a few miles north of Sonora."[22] Tuttletown is among the many places where Bret Harte is said to have taught. But Mrs. Swerer, who had lived continuously at Tuttletown since 1850, arriving there at the age of ten, stated that she had never seen Bret Harte. It seems that had Bret Harte visited Tuttletown often, she would have seen him. She said that she had frequently seen Dan de Quille and Mark Twain, and that Mark Twain made periodic visits to Tuttletown and always stayed with Jim Gillis, whom he called the "Sage of Jackass Hill."[23] Mrs. Gross, who kept the Tuttletown Hotel and whose husband kept a store across the street, was born in Tuttletown. She stated that

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21. Mrs. R. Thom, Memories of days of old, 7.
22. H. C. Merwin, The life of Bret Harte, 50.
23. T. D. Beasley, A tramp through the Bret Harte Country, 15.

she had never heard of Bret Harte in Tuttletown and considered it very unlikely that he had ever taught school there.[24]

In the early sixties Tuttletown was one of the liveliest towns in Tuolumne County. Placer mining was still carried on and quartz mining also. As early as 1851, quartz mines were worked in the vicinity of Tuttletown. The Pendleton mines had been prospected and shafts had been sunk to a considerable depth, and in all of them the rock had proved to be exceedingly rich. In the early sixties, the ten-stamp mill on the Patterson mine was kept busy on good ore and the placer miners were still successful in the gulches and ravines.[25]

Tuttletown had one store which carried a full stock of such merchandise as groceries, boots and shoes, clothing, and tools for the miners. The town boasted, also, a hotel and barber shop. The saloon was owned by one Valentine Pitorf, who never indulged to excess in his liquid refreshments in Tuttletown but once a month left his business in Tom Locket's care and went, for a few days, to Sonora to quench his thirst. On one of these occasions he left his saloon in Locket's care, telling Locket to run it as he saw fit. Locket, engaged in a poker game, put the saloon up

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24. T. D. Beasley, A tramp through the Bret Harte Country, 15.
25. W. R. Gillis, Gold rush days with Mark Twain, 11.

to cover a bet and would have lost it for its owner, or at least caused him some trouble, but the winner, after taking the money he had won and stating that he did not want the saloon, turned it over to the "boys" and left Tuttletown. Then followed the wildest orgy of carousing that Tuttletown had ever known, which was only stopped when Pitorf returned and "cleared the room with a billiard cue."[26]

Tuttletown, in the sixties, had its literary society with a membership of three hundred and a library of nearly a thousand volumes of standard poetry and prose.[27] During those prosperous times Tuttletown had its share of "soldiers of fortune," or poker sharps, who helped the miner put his money in circulation. Tom Locket, who gambled Pitorf's saloon on that memorable occasion, was one of these, as was also the quiet member of the town's literary society who was the victor in that particular game.

The scenery around Jackass Hill is both varied and beautiful. The rugged Bear Mountain range extends from the southwestern portion of Tuolumne County, across Calaveras, and into Amador County. In the vicinity lay Humbug Hill and the Rawhide Ranch. All that remains of Tuttletown today is an old abandoned adobe building and a frame

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26. Gillis, Gold rush days with Mark Twain, 16.
27. Ibid., 11.

structure, now a store with a gas pump in front of it and a few loungers on its wooden porch.[28]

The old hotel is surrounded by trees, and there is still a strange fascination about the ruins of what was once one of the liveliest mining camps in the Sierra region with four faro tables running day and night. Jackass Hill is honeycombed with prospect holes, tunnels and shafts. Even as late as 1914 some prospect work was being done there.[29] Several shafts, with windlasses to which ropes were attached, could be seen. Tuttletown is in the belt of pocket and milling mines and the back country is devoted to farming, so, some day, it may rise again in commercial importance. Tuttletown and its neighbor, Jackass Hill, can never die, nor can the characters who peopled them be forgotten, so long as the works of Mark Twain and Bret Harte are read.

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28. G. B. Glasscock, A golden highway, 281.
29. Beasley, A tramp through the Bret Harte Country, 20.

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