Exploring the Golden State
A Readers’ Journey Through California History
Cead Mile Failte!
(A Thousand Welcomes)
Thank You Fromm Staff!

- Derek
- Carla
- Scott
- Dawa
- Herbert
- Alfredo
Thank You Fromm Students!

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Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning at the University of San Francisco
Rough Course Schedule

- June 3: Discoveries
- June 10: Gilded Age Writers
- June 17: Progressive Era & After
- June 24: War and Postwar

(Images will be made available)

(Policy on Breaks)
Why “A Readers’ Journey?”

- Have taught California history at USF for two decades
- Through travel and reading, I like to keep au courant
- My engagement with the books changes
- Shelter in place: Book recommendations
Why “A Readers’ Journey?”

- Corrective to Eastern condescension
- All California writers, from Harte to Charles Bukowski, have struggled against this critical dismissiveness
- Reading these critics, you’d come away thinking California writers had no style, no authentic characters, no plot structure, no depth of meaning
Why “A Readers’ Journey?”

- In the eyes of eastern critics, California writers lacked the essential qualities that make for great literature; that California writers lacked everything except appreciative READERS!

- Except appreciative READERS!
Today’s Topics

- Queen Califia’s Island
- Richard Henry Dana and *Two Years*
- Dame Shirley
- Alonzo Delano
- George Derby
- John Rollin Ridge
- Bret Harte
Why Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo Matters

- Castilian author
- *Las sergas de Esplandián*
- Described a mythical Island of California as being west of the Indies
James Duval Phelan’s
Villa Montalvo
Queen Califia’s Island
(Califia: Likely an Arabic Word)
Questions?
Highly Recommended!
Richard Henry Dana
A Remarkably Perceptive Observer
Why Richard Henry Dana Matters

- Observations provided an anthropological sample of Mexican California
- Awakened East to the West
- Launched the literary seafaring trend
Dana Point, CA
Named for Richard Henry Dana
Still a classic, still read

Remarkable to read today, appeals to students and adults alike (dentist)

Observant young man’s twenty-five months at sea and in Mexican California
What Dana Saw
“The Californians are an idle, thriftless people, and can make nothing for themselves. The country abounds in grapes, yet they buy, at a great price, bad wine made in Boston.”
The Hide Market
“California Bank Notes”
Monterey Custom House
Shipping Hides
“Monterey, as far as my observation goes, is decidedly the pleasantest and most civilized-looking place in California.”
“If California ever becomes a prosperous country, this bay will be the centre of its prosperity.”
Richard Henry Dana in Perspective

- Dispute over his view of California
- Influenced other writers
- Letter from friend about what really happened
- Letter to wife: “My life ashore has been a mistake”
Questions?

A Yankee in Mexican California, 1834–1836

Richard Henry Dana Jr.
The Shirley Letters

from the CALIFORNIA MINES, 1851–1852

Louise Amelia Knapp Smith Clappe

Edited with an Introduction by Marlene Smith-Baranzini
How do we know what we know?
Why “Dame Shirley” Matters

- How do we know what we know?

- First-person accounts of the Gold Rush

- Written over a period of time (1851 & 1852)

- Deeply observational, perceptive
Why “Dame Shirley” Matters

- Perspective of a woman
- Established framework, template, for understanding and interpreting Gold Rush California
- Future cultural representations: John Rollin Ridge, Bret Harte
Gold Rush Era Writers

- Louise(a) Amelia Knapp Smith Clapp(e) (Dame Shirley)
- Alonzo Delano (Old Block)
- George Horatio Derby (Squibob, John P. Phoenix)
- Prentice Mulford (Dogberry)
- John Rollin Ridge (Yellowbird)
Gold Rush Era Writers

- Samuel L. Clemens (Mark Twain)
- Francis Bret(t) Hart(e) (Bret Harte)
- Charles Farrar Brown(e) (Artemus Ward)
- Josephine Smith (Ina Coolbrith)
- Cincinnatus Heine Miller (Joaquin Miller)
“Ye Old(e) Pub(e)”
The Enigmatic Dame Shirley

- Geographically, she was associated with altogether too many places for proper detection
- Wrote and taught school in California for three decades
The Enigmatic Dame Shirley

- Records destroyed 1906
- Lived in retirement in the New York city area for two decades
- Returned to her native state of New Jersey for the last decade of her life
The Shirley Letters

- The Shirley Letters were not published in book form until 1922.
- Since then they have been enthusiastically studied by historians searching for accounts of the California Gold Rush.
Novelist and historian Wallace Stegner has called the “finest of all Gold Rush books.”
Violence
Her sympathy for the frequently impoverished and lonely lives of most miners kept her from too severely criticizing their raucous misconduct.
She found that, despite their many shortcomings, “the miners, as a class, possess many truly admirable characteristics.”
Questions?
Kevin Starr on Gold Rush
Humor and Satire

“Predominantly male communities, by turns good-humored or violent, beyond the reach of society, encouraged humor as a way of dealing with novelty, uncertainty, debauchery, and violence.”
Alonzo “Old Block” Delano
Alonzo “Old Block” Delano

- Great-grandfather, Phillipe de la Noye, also great-great-great-great-grandfather of FDR
Why Alonzo Delano Matters

- His work revealed that there was an audience for clever satire about the Gold Rush.
- Delano’s sketches of gold rush camp life rivaled Bret Harte and Mark Twain, both of whom he influenced.
Grass Valley, 1852
Delano settled in Grass Valley as a banker and agent for Wells Fargo
Grass Valley: California’s “Concord”
Alonzo Delano, Lola Montez, Lotta Crabtree,
Josiah Royce, John Rollin Ridge, Wallace Stegner
Alonzo Delano

❖ “California Humor” style
❖ Social commentary
❖ Similar to Will Rogers
❖ Died Grass Valley, 1874 (68)
George Horatio “Squibob” Derby
(Squib: a small piece of satirical writing)
George Horatio Derby

- Massachusetts born, 1823
- Reputation as a practical joker at West Point
- Early California-style humorist
George Derby

- Deployed to California as a lieutenant, 1852 to 1856
- Stationed at San Diego
- While waiting for approval of his San Diego River diversion plans, he had some time on his hands
George Horatio Derby

- His articles written to appear as a running narrative
- Some of California’s first published humor
- As “Squibob” he wrote articles poking fun at the pretenses of society
DEDICATED TO
LT. GEORGE H. DERBY U.S.A.
1823 - 1861
HUMORIST, ENGINEER AND BUILDER OF
THE FIRST DIKE TO SAFEGUARD SAN
DIEGO BAY AS A NAVIGABLE HARBOR.
SAN DIEGO CHAPTER D.A.R.
SAN DIEGO CHAPTER G.A.R.
NOV. 3, 1962

DERBY DIKE
FEDERAL FLOOD CONTROL
PROJECT 1823

GEORGE H. DERBY, BUILDER
(JOHN PHOENIX)
U.S. TOPOGRAPHICAL CORPS.
SQUIBB CHAPTER, E.S.
APRIL 24, 1966
Questions About George Derby or Alonzo Delano?
John Rollin Ridge
“Yellowbird”
Grass Valley, 1852
Why John Rollin Ridge Matters

- American Indian novelist
- Central character is a person of color
- Distinctive and refreshingly different perspective on ’49
- Mexican protagonist’s point of view
John Rollin Ridge “Yellowbird”

- Georgia-born son of prominent Cherokee
- To the Gold Rush, 1850
- Racial tensions
- *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta* (1854)
The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta

- The first novel to feature a Mexican American hero
- California’s second best-seller (after Dana’s *Two Years*)
- Tale about Mexicans rising up against US rule in California
- Inspired the creation of Zorro
THE HEAD OF THE RENOWNED BANDIT

JOAQUIN!

TO BE EXHIBITED

AT THE STOCKTON HOUSE

AUG. 19, 1853 - $1

ONE DAY ONLY

The following is one of the many affidavits, certificates, etc., proving the identity of the Head:

STATE OF CALIFORNIA - COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO, &c:
Ignacio Lisarraga, of Sonora, being duly sworn, says: - That he has seen the alleged head of Joaquin, now on exhibition, and that deponent was well acquainted with Joaquin Murrieta, and that the head exhibited as above is and was the veritable head of Joaquin Murrieta, the celebrated Bandit. Further says not. IGNACIO LISARRAGA.
Please make a donation in box to view the head of Joaquin Murrieta.
Joaquin Murieta