Methodists' Gold Washings

As earlier said, the '46er methodists accomplished many firsts. Less known was Mrs. Aram's discovery of gold—predating James Marshall's nugget in the race mill at Coloma by almost two years. Despite this amazing fact, Santa Clara methodists only moderately invested in gold-digging, avoiding the worst symptoms of the 'gold fever'.

The methodist Discovery of Gold, on the way to Sutter's Fort from the Sierra peaks, happened in late-September 1846. While Mrs. Hecox washed clothes on the banks of the Bear River, she noticed 'something brightly gleaming in the water'. She gathered her apron full of the shining specks and carried them to her husband. Mr. Hecox thought it a good joke. It's also said the same Party laughed as they spied more glittering granola in their morning coffee.

The big find on the same day was when Mrs. Aram noticed a gold nugget, about the size of a dime. The specimen was later tested & found genuine. Of course, Mrs. Aram's discovery might have inaugurated California's Gold Rush, but 'the country was in such a tumult at the time that people had little opportunity to search for or even think of gold in the Sierra Nevada'. Indeed, the Mexican War was in progress, and once the Aram company reached Sutter's Fort, they enlisted in Col. Fremont's battalion.

However, upon the War's termination, California's mining interest bolted upward. Sutter's yellow metal made headlines, first noticed by the *California Star* in their comparatively subdued June 1848 article, 'Rush to the Gold Washings'. The methodist pioneers in Santa Clara were not immune from the growing excitement in Coloma, so by early Spring most had left for the fields, taking advantage of early diggings.

Among our church founders— e.g., Hecox, Aram, and Anthony—sudden alluvial wealth permitted fast investment in agricultural pursuits. Mr. Hecox was quite successful, picking up six pounds of gold in a single day & opening the mine now known as Placerville. After the summer, Hecox returned to Santa Cruz to establish his family on a larger lot.

It seems our Argonauts followed, if not purchased shares, in Cpt. Weber's mining operations, generally following Weber's exploration of the fields—initially, below Coloma and up the Stanislaus. Wherever was the Stockton Mining Co., men from San Jose could be found nearby. Incidentally, Weber was the same commander that Campbell's oldest son served under while defending the Santa Clara Mission in early 1847.

When Hecox's returned to Placerville at the end of the Summer 1848, he found Mr. Aram stranded on the Mokelumne River. Hecox redirected him to Sonora where Aram did very well selling mining supplies, enabling him to open the first nursery for our County.

At this time, Rev. Anthony accompanied elder Roberts from San Francisco to Coloma. Anthony opened a store & smithery in this mining center. Profits were not only sent to his family in San Francisco but paid the expenses for Robert's missionary tour. With Anthony's charity at hand, elder Roberts gathered the first church in the Californian mines. Rev. Anthony pastored the Coloma methodists from 1848 (its institution) to '49, before relocating to his beloved Santa Cruz.

Curiously, our methodist people limited their diggings to short season. Most quickly returned to sober life after the summer of '48 before the massive onrush of '49. Interestingly, networks made between Battalion members and Emigrant Companies apparently continued into mining camps, with men like Anthony preaching and keeping fellowships alive. Hence, the Santa Clara methodists have surprising ties to Coloma, and

likely other, older ME churches in the southern Motherload. – Charles Bartlett