

and property valued at 1,000,000 dollars. By the arduous efforts of the firemen and citizens, it was prevented from spreading in that rich and crowded district.

The winter of 1850-51 was remarkably dry, scarcely any rain falling. It was the very reverse of the winter preceding. Extensive preparations had been made against wet, the principal streets being nicely covered with plank, and the roofs of storehouses secured from leakage. The "Old Californians" got their long boots in readiness, but, though they mounted them every foggy morning, and strode through the streets in defiance of weather, the rain did not come. The sky was mostly cloudless, and the air mild and balmy.

The constant and long continued inpouring of merchandise, from all quarters of the world, had by this time filled the market to repletion. In all parts of the State the storehouses were crammed with goods. There followed in the spring of 1851, a great depression of trade, with prices extremely low. Goods sold at auction were mostly sacrificed, in many cases not bringing the first cost. This state of things continued till the importations had greatly diminished in the latter part of the year, and the stock had been reduced by consumption and by fire. Coal sold as low as eight dollars a ton, flour ten dollars a barrel, and clothing was cheaper than in the Atlantic cities.

At the second election under the City Charter, in April, 1851, the votes were something over 5,920. C. J. Brenham was chosen Mayor, and R. H. Waller, Recorder.

The streets being now in good order, an enterprise was set on foot to light them at night. Lamps were placed in Montgomery street, by which that street was handsomely illuminated in the evening, and the work was going forward in other streets, until it was arrested by another fire.

Of all the conflagrations that have visited the city with ruin and devastation, that of May 1851, was by far the most important, both in regard to the loss of property and the loss of life. It broke out on the evening of Saturday, the 3rd of the month, about 11 o'clock, in the upholstery establishment of Baker & Messerve situated on the south of the Plaza, adjoining the site of the present Post Office building. A high wind was blowing from the west, and the flames soon began to spread towards the bay, with astonishing rapidity, extending at the same time northward and southward. The most desperate efforts to stay the fiery torrent were utterly powerless. The scene was awfully grand, beyond the force of language to express. All night the fire continued to rage and to spread, until the morning sun rose on a city in ruins. The very heart of the city, the centre of trade and business, was eaten out, leaving little else than the sparsely built outskirts. Immense stores of valuable merchandize, filled nearly all the buildings in the track of the element. From Kearny to Battery street, and from California to Pacific, scarcely a house was left. The substantial brick and iron structures, intended to be fire-proof, melted away before the avalanche of flame. Fifteen entire blocks were consumed, besides parts of several others. The extreme limits on the north and south were Broadway and Pine streets. But five of the brick buildings on Montgomery street were left, and ten or twelve in other localities. Six persons were in the iron building of Taaffe & McCahill, on the corner of Sacra-