

A GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF

SONOMA COUNTY

Incidents of Travel, Adventures, Etc.

SONOMA, we are told, is a word of Indian origin, and means the "Valley of the Moon." Whether this is so or not we are unable to determine, not having an Indian-English Dictionary at our disposal, but we will accept the word, and let others quarrel about its meaning. Suffice it to say, that the County bearing this name is one of the most important of the State, and, as our description will show, is one of the favored spots of the new world.

Sonoma County was organized in 1850, and is bounded on the north by Lake and Mendocino, on the east by Napa and Lake, on the south by Marin and San Pablo Bay, and on the west by Marin and the Pacific Ocean. It covers an area of about 1,500 square miles, being 60 miles long by 25 miles wide, on an average, and contains a population of 20,783; 11,109 males, 9,674 females, approximately. The assessed value of taxable property in 1873, was \$16,571,476, which shows it to be by far the richest of the Counties we have described. The climate is similar to that of Napa County; perhaps a little warmer in the interior valleys. On the coast, however, the sea breeze keeps the atmosphere cool during the summer and the heavy fogs of the Pacific furnish abundance of moisture to the growing crops. The principal valleys are the Sonoma, Russian River, Santa Rosa and Petaluma Valleys, of which more will be said in this description.

Wheat, barley, oats, Indian corn, hay, potatoes, wine, wool; semi-tropical fruits, such as almonds, walnuts; also apples, peaches and all kinds of vegetables are among the principal products.

There are some quicksilver and coal ledges in the County; also several saw-mills, which will be alluded to in their turn.

The educational facilities of Sonoma County are very good. There are 87 school districts, having 102 schools: 18 of the First, 48 of the Second, and 36 of the Third grade; attended in 1873 by 4,484 children—4,468 white, 16 negro and Indian. Besides the public schools there are a number of private institutes in different portions of the County, of which we will speak hereafter.

As we shall make a round trip of the County, to visit every place of note, we will now start on our journey.

Leaving San Francisco at 2:30 P. M. by steamer, we proceed in a northerly direction toward San Pablo Bay, and reach Donahue, the terminus of the North Pacific Railroad, at 5:30—distance 34 miles. Donahue is nothing more than a railroad town, having a small resident population. It is named after Colonel Peter Donahue, the projector and builder of the North Pacific Railroad. All the workshops of the Railroad Company are located here, giving employment to a number of men. The works were destroyed by fire about a year since, but have been entirely rebuilt, and precautionary measures have been taken to avoid a second conflagration. Donahue is situated on Petaluma Creek, an arm of San Pablo Bay, on the edge of Petaluma Valley, a very rich farming district.

We now proceed to Lakeville, the steamer landing and railroad station, and here take stage for Sonoma, which we reach at 7 P. M., distance eight miles. The road from Lakeville passes over rolling ground, with very few trees, through a rich dairying district. In this neighborhood is a large tract of tule or swamp land, miles in extent, now being reclaimed.

In the year 1820 the Monks of the Order of St. Francis founded the Mission of "San Francisco de Solano de Sonoma," a short distance from the site of the present town. In 1835 General Vallejo was instructed by the Government of Mexico to find a suitable place to build a town north of San Francisco Bay. Influenced by the beauty of the locality and the mildness of the climate, he selected this spot and founded the Pueblo of Sonoma, which then became the headquarters of the Northern Military Department of Mexico. After the acquisition of the country by the Americans, Sonoma for some time remained a military post. It was the County Seat from 1850 to 1855, when Santa Rosa was selected by the people.