

3. The Development of Colma

IN THE BEGINNING all was called Colma. Robert Thornton on the beach, Patrick Brooks in the hills, Michael Comerford near Mussel Rock, each believed he lived in Colma.

In the early 1860's a Colma shopping center developed at the confluence of Mission Trail and Old San Pedro Road. Here a school developed and a railroad depot was built.

Nearby Joseph J. Hill built a store that provided the settlers with clothing and tools as well as flour and sugar and coffee. It became virtually a community center with a large and elaborate bar in one end and a post office in the other. It gave Mr. Hill an office where he conducted governmental business since he was both the county assessor and tax collector. Sometime after 1870 Mr. Hill sold his business to a Mr. Pasalaqua who passed it on to Salvadore Belli who became well known as a pioneers' merchant of Colma.

On May 5, 1867, a German immigrant named John D. Husing developed a general store on Mission Street around the corner from Joe Hill's place of business. During its history the building that housed Husing's store passed through several hands until it became a saloon that was called the White House Gardens.

Across the street from the White House Gardens, between Mission and San Pedro Roads, one Ned Daly established a butcher shop. Nearby on San Pedro Road Robert S. Thornton built a blacksmith shop and employed Jacob Bryan to work with him. Eventually Mr. Bryan bought the business, freeing Thornton to engage in real estate.

A ramshackle saloon known as Sweeneys was built on the corner of Mission and Market. It was purchased in the early 1880's by George Collopy who built there a hall that was used for dances and other forms of entertainment.

On the other side of the railroad tracks, another hall was built for the use of the farmers' grange. The building was later used as a school.

While the shopping area grew San Francisco firms were surveying the area to determine if it was suitable for the development of industry. Apparently convinced, the firm of J. Frank and Co. chose a site near the railroad station for the erection of a three story shoe manufacturing building.

As the building was being erected, on Christmas Eve 1869, a gale arose and leveled it "as flat as a pancake."¹ Undaunted, the owners rebuilt their factory, but soon disaster struck again. On August 20, 1870, the entire factory was consumed by fire. Thus perished Colma's first industry.

Later a fuse factory, employing Chinese as well as American laborers, operated in the area. Like the shoe factory it proved to be a short lived industry.

How and from whom Colma got its name remains a mystery. Some historians believe the name was applied by miners from the California goldfields and is a corruption of Coloma, a mining camp in El Dorado County. Others, however ascribe to a tale which holds that the name originated when a boy from sunnier parts of California jumped out of the train at School House Station and shouted, "Gee, it's col' Ma!"

Whatever its origin the name Colma appealed to the settlers who were not content to hear their home called School House Station or Sand Hills, or any of the names that were once used to designate the area.

St. Anne's Catholic Church was dedicated by Archbishop Alemany on July 24, 1868, and named for the oldest daughter of Peter Dunks, who had given the land for the church in memory of favors granted to his family by his daughter's patron saint and name sake.²

The church building itself was built by the Catholic settlers of the community who donated their services, time and material. When they had completed it Father Borman and Father Dempsey came from San Mateo County to conduct the first religious services in the Colma-Daly City area. History records that St. Anne's was just a mission at its inception, but later became a parish with Holy Angels as its name.

While the pioneer Catholic parish was developing, the Protestants who moved to Colma established a Sunday School that met in the worshippers' homes. As rapidly as possible the various denominations built chapels. Therefore, at the beginning of the twentieth century there were several chapels for Protestant worship in or near Colma. Much credit is given to Mrs. Henry Ward Brown for the development of Protestant chapels.³