

NUGGETS FROM THE PAST

By Norman McLeod

The late John DeMaria was a respected historian of the Foresthill Divide and a valuable member of the local historical society while he lived. When John recited an historical fact his listeners usually sat back and accepted it quietly as gospel.

Upon inspecting an old copy (dated Oct. 30 1981) of my newspaper, the FORESTHILL COMMUNITY FORUM, I ran across an old column of John's entitled "Off The Back-burner" in which he begins by relating some background of the old Secret House, today a mystery to most residents of the Divide.

It seems, according to John, that the Secret House was an early day road house or saloon mainly for the benefit of traveling miners. It was named after nearby Secret Canyon, so named because its original discoverers found rather rich gold diggings on it but kept the location secret from their fellow miners as long as possible.

At one time the House was operated by old Jeff Ralston, father of Bert Ralston, a well known Foresthill resident. An old story resurrected by John tells of a large party staged one evening in the Secret House wherein the main conversation somehow centered upon the original Mother Lode that supposedly extended the entire length of the Sierras..It was generally believed to be the source of most gold found in the state.

During the telling Old Greek John Brown became very excited and exclaimed, "I found the Mother Lode one time up by Bald Mountain but I was so afraid many people would be killed over it I buried it up again." Perhaps what Old Greek found and re-buried is there to this day.

This John Brown was a huge man standing almost seven feet tall and possessing Herculean strength. He was well aware of the "battle" of Bloody Ravine where two large bands of Greeks almost annihilated each other in a dispute over a grubstaking (sic).

At one time Tom Hobson's father owned an interest in the Macedon shaft and he would send Tom up there to represent him during cleanups. During the eve of one of these events the crew of Greeks could be seen sharpening their big knives in anticipation of the morrow that caused cold chills to run up and down Hobson's spine. The giant John Brown assured him: "If there is any trouble in the morning I will cut them all into stew meat"

There was no trouble.

The nickname "Old Greek" probably was given to John Brown by the sailors on the clipper ship that carried him to California, like so many other Europeans at the time, and the name stuck. He was a fine looking man with a big well-trimmed square beard. (Thanks to John for the story.)