

# What Did You Do With the Body, Dearie?

By NANCY BARR MAVITY

Arthur Leroy Antoine was in some respects the most unusual and certainly the most macabre murderer I ever met.

Not that he was any mastermind plotting the perfect crime. It would be on the safe side to describe him as stupid—too stupid to tell one simple lie and stick to it or remember the next day just what tale he had told the day before.

On the other hand, he bade fair to make the wild goose a permanent emblem for all the law enforcement and investigative agencies of Alameda and adjoining counties, from Oakland to Campo Seco.

He was an involved and tortuous liar—yet so lacking in ordinary imagination that he could cook breakfast for his two children on the stove in which his wife's bones were charring. He had never, up to the time of his trial for murder, heard the words "corpus delicti"—yet he so bemused a jury on this point as to escape a death sentence in the face of overwhelming evidence.

## UNLIKELY PERSON

No one would ever have picked the name of Arthur Antoine as likely to appear in the paper, unless maybe among the vital statistics. It did, though, in a two-and-a-half-inch item on March 27, 1928. Having remarried four days after his first wife left him, the item ran, Antoine faced a possible bigamy charge. The brother of the garage mechanic's bride of two months had asked the police to look into the bridegroom's marital status. Presumably I glanced at the item, but if so I paid it no mind.

Late the next evening, I sat under the glaring overhead lights of a small bare room in City Hall with Antoine and the 18-year-old girl he had wooed at her family's ranch in the autumn and had wed in January. "Haven't you anything to tell me, dearie?" she asked him.

when she asked, "What did you do with the body, dearie?" Antoine was glib, but he was various. He evaded the question, both then and when the authorities asked it without the endearments. The wild goose chase was on.

First, one mild spring twilight, a cavalcade of police and press cars jarrapped up to Carquinez Bridge, where Antoine said he had thrown two gunny-sacks of Ada's remains into the water after removing the bones. It was a quiet sunset, I remember, and he stood in silhouette, leaning slightly over the bridge parapet to point out the exact position of his heave. The sacks were heavy, he said.

This, of course, brought the Contra Costa authorities into the picture. Boats and grappling hooks were hired. University and Government experts calculated the drift of tide and undercurrent. The newspapers kept "death watch" on proceedings—the first of many such vigils. For it became increasingly evident that Antoine was playing for time and focussing the attention and energies of the authorities first on one spot and then another.

## INDEPENDENT SEARCHES

In addition to following all his leads—just in case he might at one time or another be telling the truth—the authorities did not neglect to make independent searches of their own, with varying secrecy, depending on the alertness and luck of the closely pursuing press.

In the midst of this rat-race and during a temporary lull, I was sent out to Berkeley to look into a minor matrimonial mix-up. On the way, the camera man confessed that he had inadvertently left his tripod at the "murder" cottage in East Oak-

land the day before. We agreed to make a sneak detour to pick it up on the way back to the office.

But all ideas of secrecy were forgotten when we drew up to the curb behind a couple of police cars and saw a knot of men absently digging in the back yard of the house on Brown Avenue. The policemen were too intent to notice our intrusion for a moment. One of them lifted up a spadeful of glutinous earth that wafted a sickening odor.

"Careful, boys, looks like this might be it," he warned. MINUTE TO WONDER

I had a minute to wonder just how much I could take, a reluctance immediately overcome by a quick look around which confirmed the impression that we were the only newspapermen on the scene. I took a deep breath and held it.

Somebody grumbled: "What the hell are you doing here!" but did not stop to pursue the subject. The cameraman set up his recovered tripod at a vantage point just beyond the circle. Visions of an "exclusive" discovery of the first Mrs. Antoine's missing body obliterated all natural revulsion.

At last the surrounding earth was loosened and a core of solid mass was carefully lifted. There are moments when anticlimax can strike as hard as any shock. The policemen had exhumed—the body of a dog.

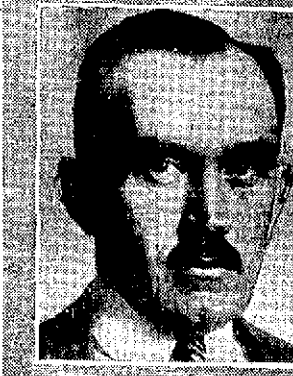
Still, the carefully concealed fact that police search had concentrated on the Antoine back yard was well worth a new "lead." I beat it to the nearest telephone. Perhaps my suspense build-up was too good. At any rate, when I sprang the dog on him, the city editor blew up with a loud report.

I had not been assigned that morning to cover the Antoine case, he told me, but to interview a woman in Berkeley. What was I doing in East Oakland, anyway? All this I had to take, because it is a fixed ethic among reporters to take the rap when necessary, and always to cover up for one of their fellows. The matter of the mislaid tripod

must on no account be mentioned.

I made a mental note that I would have to come up with something pretty good on the Antoine case to expunge my gaffe. The chance did not come at once—but it came.

(Next week: "The Wild Goose Chase.")



Arthur Leroy Antoine (left), after killing his wife, Ada, in order to marry her successor, Lila (right), told police he had tossed the body over Carquinez Bridge and pointed out the spot; boats and apparatus were assembled for days of dredging operations, as shown above.—Tribune photos.



# Will Lack of \$300,000 Finally Strike Colors of 'Old Ironsides'?

By GEORGE GRUNER  
Tribune Staff Writer

If Oliver Wendell Holmes were alive today, he would take pen in hand and write another stanza to his famous poem, "Old Ironsides." For although the U.S. Frigate "Constitution" is no longer in danger of being scrapped, a large sum of money is again needed to return the historic ship to a state of first-class preservation.

Workmen at the Boston Naval Shipyard, home port of Old Ironsides since 1897, are now completing a \$75,000 repair job on America's most honored fighting ship, but Navy spokesmen classify the work as only "routine." The planning division of the yard estimates an additional \$300,000—only \$2917 less than the ship's original cost—is needed to place the vessel in the best possible condition.

But rare indeed is the person who does not think the ship worth every cent spent to maintain the symbol of the days when victory rested in the seamanship and fighting ability of men, rather than in machines and super-weapons. Her long record—which runs the gamut from the triumph that established the United States as a naval power to a near-mutiny

in her crew—is a miniature history of the evolution of the fleet of today.

Dry rot is now the main enemy of the frigate, which has been conquered only by the ravages of time. And even these victories have been only temporary, for after each "campaign" the Constitution has been rebuilt so that in recent years its appearance has been the same as in the days of its most famous achievements.

Most of the 152-year-old vessel's timbers below the water line are still in good shape, but the side planking, exposed to the air, is especially susceptible to deterioration. Approximately 80 per cent of this portion of the ship will have to be eventually replaced.

The current status of the Navy in the Department of Defense casts a shadow on the future of the great naval shrine. Officials wonder, in the face of recent cutbacks in appropriations for the sea service, where funds for the necessary work

will be obtained. Even the \$75,000 used in the present "routine" repair was not directly appropriated by Congress for the Constitution. The money was assigned to the Boston Naval Shipyard by the Bureau of Ships from Navy general funds.

Present repairs, expected to be completed by June 30, consist chiefly of the installation of a new bowsprit and the reconstruction of spars and rigging.

Biggest phase of the current project is the forming of the new bowsprit. Four 70-foot Douglas firs, felled in Oregon, were brought to Boston to be shaped by workmen under the direction of Thomas F. Murray of Dorchester, Mass., master woodworker at the yard.

Modern machines proved inadequate to handle the 70-foot timbers, so the workers had to use broadaxes, adzes and draw knives—the same tools used in the construction of the frigate more than a century ago.

Murray, whose experience with ship construction dates back to 1894 when he first came to work at the yard as an ap-

prentice shipwright, knows as much about the condition of Old Ironsides as any living man. In the continuous employ of the naval installation since 1925, he worked on the ship during the major rebuilding program of 1927-30, and is now in charge of all woodwork aboard.

The Constitution, which probably has travelled more miles than any other ship of her type, may never again feel the surge of ocean swells beneath her prow, for experts no longer consider the vessel seaworthy. Visited by more than 4,000,000 persons during a tour of 90 Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific Coast ports during 1930-34, the vessel is now thought to be too frail for such a journey.

But more and more people each year come to Boston to visit the famous ship, whose decks once fell the footsteps of some of the most illustrious personages in U.S. Naval history. Closed to the public during the war emergency, the ship was again opened for inspection in September, 1945. From that time until May, 1947, approximately 100,000 persons were logged aboard. That fig-

ure was almost doubled in 1948, when 174,000 visitors viewed the ship's relics. An even higher mark was set in 1949, due to longer visiting hours during the summer months.

Americans have not been the only visitors aboard the frigate. Royalty, too, has stood in awe beneath her masts. Foreign dignitaries who have toured the ship in its long history include a king and queen of Greece, an Egyptian viceroy, a king of Naples, Queen Wilhelmina of The Netherlands, the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, and Pope Pius IX.

No ship now afloat can boast a record of service equalling that of Old Ironsides. Fully recommissioned on direct orders of President Roosevelt in August, 1940, the Constitution has served since as the flagship of the commandant of the First Naval District.

Two older vessels—the Constitution's sister ship, the "Constellation," and the British 100-gun "Victory"—still exist, but their status is entirely different.

## SISTER SHIP AFLOAT

The Constellation, launched 13 days before Old Ironsides, still floats, but only the hull of this old ship remains. The same order which recommissioned the Constitution placed the Constellation in "reduced commission." It is estimated that a sum of \$2,000,000 would be required to place her in a state of repair comparable to that of her sister ship.

The Victory, Admiral Lord Nelson's flagship at Trafalgar, was launched in 1785, but she no longer feels the touch of the sea. The ship has been imbedded in a concrete base at Portsmouth, England.

The current deterioration of Old Ironsides cannot be classified as an emergency in the ship's life. Many times in the past the frigate has been closer to facing either demolition or a grave at sea.

Launched at Boston October 21, 1797, after twice sticking on the ways (an occurrence which superstitious sailors interpreted as boding ill for the future of the ship), the Constitution has been decommissioned more than five times in her long history. It was late in 1828, after the frigate's fighting days were over, that Oliver Wendell Holmes read of plans to scrap the vessel. His heart-felt poem, blasting the "harpies of the shovels," resulted in a public clamor which saved the vessel for future generations. Another major crisis in the life of the old ship came when plans were made to use Old Ironsides as a target for guns of the modern fleet. Again, an uproar of protest prevented her destruction.

## HISTORIC FIGURES

Lending weight to the traditions of the frigate is the long list of naval heroes who commanded her. Captain Samuel Nicholson was her first skipper. Others who followed included Captain Isaac Hull, Commodore Edward Preble, Captain Stephen Decatur, Commodore John Rodgers, Captain William Bainbridge, Captain Charles Stewart, Captain John "Mad Jack" Percival and Lieutenant George Dewey, the admiral of

Spanish-American War fame. Dewey served aboard the ship in 1880, when the vessel was being used to train midshipmen at Annapolis, Md.

Nor should her crew be forgotten. Outstanding among these men was Reuben James, who, during the burning of the frigate "Philadelphia" in Tripoli harbor in 1803, took the blow of an enemy cannon on his own head to save the life of Decatur. It was by the slim margin of one vote that the Congress of 1794 passed an act authorizing the construction of six frigates, one of which became the Constitution. A leading exponent of the establishment of the first ships of the modern American Navy was President George Washington, whose words might well be repeated by present-day advocates of a large sea arm of defense:

"To secure respect, a neutral flag requires a naval force organized and ready to vindicate it from insult and aggression."

## REVOLUTIONARY DESIGN

Were it not for the fact that the ways beneath Old Ironsides sagged under her great weight, the vessel would be the oldest American fighting ship afloat today. The frigate was originally scheduled to be launched on September 20, 1797, but the two delays in sliding her into the water enabled the Constellation to touch the sea first, on October 8.

Many famous figures of colonial days contributed to the building of Old Ironsides. Paul Revere's factory supplied the copper rivets and bolts for her frame. Betsy Ross turned out the flags and bunting. But neglected by many chroniclers of the great ship is the man who made possible her many victories—the designer, Joshua Humphreys.

The lines of the Constitution were the boldest step forward in ship construction in a decade. She was larger than the British frigates and faster than the French. Her height above water—more than eight feet above the gundeck port sills—made it possible for her to engage double and triple-decked ships in bad weather or heavy seas, when larger vessels were forced to close their lower gundeck ports.

Humphreys designed the ship longer and broader than existing frigates of that day. Her length was 204 feet and beam more than 45 feet. Her tonnage was 1325 and displacement 2200 tons. The Constitution carried 140 tons of ballast. The stability of the ship allowed her to carry a heavy spread of canvas. In 1806, while being towed, the frigate broke loose and made sail, establishing a record of 13½ knots—a good mark even for ships of recent years.

Wood used in the ship's construction included live oak, red cedar, white oak, pitch pine and locust, hewn in states ranging from Maine to South Carolina and Georgia.

At that time, no other nation had used live oak for shipbuilding, and America's use of this new wood was derided by European naval experts. The

British called our ships "fire-bull" frigates." Later, their decision turned to respect.

The heavier guns of the Constitution were another departure from concepts of the period. Other frigates of her size were equipped with 18-pounders. Old Ironsides was designed to carry 44 24-pounders, but often was armed with as many as 54 guns.

During her fighting career, the Constitution captured or destroyed more than 20 enemy ships. Her most famous engagement was with the 40-gun British frigate, Guerriere, off the Gulf of St. Lawrence on August 19, 1812.

As the British ship opened fire, the Constitution, under Captain Hull, bore down on the enemy vessel in silence, her gunners holding smoking punk matches near loaded cannon. Then the order to fire was given and the roar of a broadside echoed across the water. The Guerriere's mizenmast lapped into the sea.

A few broadsides later, the British ship's foremast and mainmast fell and the battle was over. The Guerriere was such a wreck that it had to be sunk. Historians say the engagement, which lasted only 30 minutes, marked the emergence of the United States as a great naval power.

## EARNED NICKNAME

It was during this battle that the Constitution earned the title of "Old Ironsides." A roundshot from the Guerriere struck the wooden sides of the frigate and bounced off into the sea, causing a crew member to declare that "her sides are made of iron." The title caught the public's fancy and today the ship is probably better known by that name.

The Constitution's last great victory occurred February 20, 1815, after the Treaty of Ghent had been signed and the war with Great Britain ended. Captain Charles Stewart, who had not been advised of the end of hostilities, ran down and captured the British frigate "Cyane" and the sloop "Levant" in a three-cornered battle. The Levant later escaped when a British squadron took up the pursuit of the American ship.

No vessel of the modern Navy has served as flagship as many times, or at as many stations, as has the Constitution. Her flag record includes: 1803, fleet attacking Barbary pirates; 1809-10, home squadron; 1821-28, Mediterranean squadron; 1835-38, Mediterranean squadron; 1839-41, Pacific squadron; 1842-43, home squadron; 1843-53, Mediterranean and African

squadrons, and 1945 to date, First Naval District.

Ironically, a near-mutiny once occurred on this famous ship. It was during 1807. The Constitution had been on duty in the Mediterranean since late in 1803 and the crew had become discontented over their long sojourn away from home.

While tied up in the harbor of Syracuse, Captain Hugh Campbell, then in command, learned of seditious sentiments growing in the crew and gave the order to put to sea. Commands to "un-moor ship" were ignored by the seamen. It was not until after the captain had assembled the ship's officers, armed the Marine guard, and made an impassioned plea to the sailors that they moved to their posts and got the ship under way. Thus, a black mark on the frigate's great record was narrowly averted.

## ROUND-WORLD TRIP

Old Ironsides' many cruises included a trip around the world during 1844-46. The west-to-east voyage, which covered 55,000 miles and 26 foreign ports, included 495 days at sea. Her skipper at that time was Captain "Mad Jack" Percival, who in his early days of sailing had been impressed by the British into service aboard Lord Nelson's Victory. Percival was 67 before the round-the-world trip was over.

The Constitution's last visit to a foreign port was in 1878, when the frigate carried American exhibits to France for the Paris Exposition. Her cargo on this trip included streetcars and a locomotive.

Taken to Boston in 1897 for the celebration of the ship's 100th birthday, Old Ironsides lay there decaying until 1925, when Naval authorities declared the ship would have to be completely restored or she would rot and sink.

Millions of American school children contributed pennies to raise funds for the project, which cost almost \$1,000,000. Congress appropriated \$300,000 to finish the job.

Since that time, only "routine" repairs have been made on the frigate. But Navy spokesmen point out that when another major reconstruction is undertaken at least a portion of the wood that will be needed is readily available.

Live oak felled more than 100 years ago was used in the restoration of 1927-30. The remainder of this supply is now in storage in a pond near Portsmouth, N.H., ready to replace the "iron" sides of the Constitution that have become "rusted" by time.



# Wild Goose Chase Starts Over Again

By NANCY BARR MAVITY  
(Last of Two Parts)

Arthur Leroy Antoine was in jail, charged with the peculiarly gruesome murder of his first wife, Ada. But though the authorities were convinced of his guilt, they were not happy about the situation. Something was lacking—something practically if not legally essential before the case could be brought to trial.

I interviewed Antoine during this interim, and received a strange impression. I have met too many murderers to regard them as a class apart, with a visible brand on their foreheads. Experience has taught me to regard them as human beings like the rest of us. Yet when Antoine extended his hand at parting, it required a definite effort of will for me to take it. This reluctance, this irrational feeling that in shaking the hand of Antoine I was touching something evil, is a reaction I had never felt before, and never since.

### PLEASED WITH SELF

He was a slender, dark, shuffling, nondescript young man. If there was a crafty brain behind the dull brown eyes, it was not a brain of high intelligence. But he was, on the whole, well pleased with himself. There was self-satisfaction in his smile. He, the ignorant farm hand, was baffling all the trained law enforcement agencies of Alameda County. Even though he was sitting in jail, he was "sitting pretty."

He fed the authorities false alarms and had them gnashing their teeth in frustration. For, though they had a strong web of circumstantial evidence, and had lured Antoine into confessing his guilt to his second wife, they were still without external proof that a crime had been committed at all. They still lacked the indispensable "corpus delicti."

The efforts of the investigators to supply this lack netted a mammoth catch of rumors and red herrings. A neighbor woman reported that she had seen Ada Antoine alive after the date when, by Antoine's story, he had killed her. Hope rose when a body was recovered from Carquinez Strait—but it was the wrong body.

### PINPOINT STAIN

An inch-by-inch search of the Brown Avenue cottage finally revealed in the crack where the baseboard met the wall behind the bed, a single, almost microscopic, speck. The pinpoint

stain, under expert analysis, was found to be human blood. This, in addition to Antoine's own statement, and a tangle of suspicious circumstances, furnished the necessary evidence that a crime had been committed.

This was the "corpus delicti"—sufficient by the definition of law, but mighty slim pickings for a jury. However, though Antoine sent poses and press scurrying all the way to Calaveras County and way points with fresh accounts of his hiding place for the corpse, the main outlines of the confession itself remained unchanged. They were detailed, revolting and convincing.

It was at this point that the city editor, or so I thought, punished me for my "detour" to the Antoine back yard without orders. He detailed me to attend the Juvenile Court hearing in which the Antoine children would be made formally wards of the court—a routine procedure in the circumstances, since their natural guardian was awaiting trial for murder.

### LITTLE NEWS VALUE

It was sure to be boring, time-consuming and of no news value, I spluttered. The city editor retorted that complete coverage of any story meant that no stage of the proceedings be left unprotected. The editors of other papers, I noted as I took a seat in the sparsely tenanted courtroom, had more heat for their poor downtrodden reporters. I viciously dodged an arrow through a heart—with no reference to cupid. I was mentally piercing the vital organs of my city editor with a sharp instrument as minor cases droned by.

Finally Antoine was brought over from the City Jail, looking as little interested as I felt. A subtle change in his voice brought me upright in my seat. "Where is your wife at the present time?" the court asked, according to form.

"I have no idea," said Antoine. "She left me last January and



After leading authorities on one wild goose chase after another in search of the body of his murdered wife, Arthur

Leroy Antoine, having escaped the death penalty, at last came forth with the right "tip" and sent policemen scurry-

ing with spades to a dry river bottom, where they exhumed the long-missing "corpus delicti" of murder.

I have not seen her since. I hope she will make her whereabouts known, and get me out of my present difficulties."

Then and there Arthur Antoine stood up in court and repudiated his entire confession—in time, I hastily calculated as I rushed out of the room to grab the nearest telephone, to make our final night edition, ours and no other!

### HANDLED BY WARREN

He was lying, presumably. But after all, the confession extracted from him by the woman he loved was the shaky kingpin of the prosecution. The very absurdity and inconsistency of his lies made all his testimony suspect and might hopelessly muddle the case against him as constructed by the then District Attorney, now Governor, Earl Warren.

A judge may instruct a jury until he is blue in the face that circumstantial evidence is of no less weight than direct

evidence and that a whole corpse is not required for a corpus delicti. But it is an unsafe bet that 12 members of a jury will find themselves able to accept these instructions absolutely and literally.

At the trial, the confession was admitted in evidence, with all its grisly details of how Antoine spent 19 hours hawking his wife's flesh into strips while the children slept, then stuffed the pieces into a closet out of sight during the day. It related how he poured kerosene over her bones and set fire to them in the stove, cooking the little boys' breakfast by their heat. The experts brought forward their laboratory analysis of the tiny bloodstain behind the bed.

But all the same the authorities continued to question Antoine again and again as to what happened next—what he had done with the body. It was the suspicion that Antoine was a

liar—and sounder judgment was never made—which had first brought Lloyd Stovall to the Oakland police station, dissatisfied with his brother-in-law's glib but too various explanations of the end of his first marriage. Clumsy lying started his downfall—but, as it turned out, it served him better than brilliant planning.

For this same inconsistency, muddle and confusion tied the prosecution in a skein of cobwebs and stirred a sediment of doubt in the minds of the jurors. If Antoine had said once that he killed his wife with a hammer, he had also said that he saw her jump off a bridge. And where, O where was the body?

Two months almost to the day after the first inconspicuous item with its small two-line head, "Facts Bigamy After Too Easy Marriage," Arthur Leroy Antoine was found guilty of first degree murder, but with a rider fixing the penalty at life

imprisonment, not death. Two days later, having now nothing to lose, he led the deputy sheriffs on their last wild goose chase, this time to the bed of Old River, in San Joaquin County.

The reporters still kept their perfunctory death-watch, but with the weariness of the shepherd boy who had jumped too often to the cry of "wolf!" Tired of waiting while the deputies dug, they knocked off for half an hour to go to the nearest town for a bite of lunch—all except one lone reporter, our own, ingrained with our city editor's doctrine that no angle of a story is ever to be left unprotected.

### FIRST HAND STORY

This time, at long last, Antoine had told the truth. The exhumation was not a pretty sight—but it was a beautiful moment in the eyes of the reporter, jubilant with an exclusive eye-witness account of the discovery.

But even then, Antoine had had the last word, or lack of it. The head to the body was not with the rest. Identification had to be inferential. It has never been found to this day. When he entered San Quentin prison, Antoine begged that Lila his second wife be brought to see him. He had something important, he said, to tell her, but would reveal nothing more. Perhaps to tell her where the head—the actual, long lost, clinching, identifiable corpus delicti—could be found?

But by this time the authorities had had quite enough. The message to Lila was never delivered.

Antoine appeared once again in the headlines last year. His ninth petition for parole was denied in 1948, at which time Governor Warren, who as district attorney had prosecuted him 20 years before, remem-

bered him as the most "atrocious" criminal ever sentenced from Alameda County.

### STILL IS PUZZLE

Yet again, however, Antoine, whose intermediate history had been necessarily uneventful while he served his life sentence for murder, produced the unpredictable, bewildering and disconcerting event.

The prison authorities regarded him as "a fine man and an excellent mechanic." Gradually he had won his way to a position of "minimum security," allowed the quasi-liberty of work on the prison farm. Finally he was transferred last year to the Institution for Men at Chino.

At this moment of writing, Arthur Leroy Antoine is at large. He escaped on April 13, 1949, and has not been recaptured. Once again, as 22 years ago, bemused authorities are on the wild goose chase, and liking it no better than before.

# N.Y. 'Expatriates' Revive Virginia City's Bonanza Days

Special to The Tribune  
VIRGINIA CITY, Nevada, June 25. — Time was when news from the Comstock variously transmitted, first by Wells Fargo stage and Pony Express, later by the Overland Telegraph and mails aboard the incomparable Virginia & Truckee Railroad, came to the San Francisco Bay area vibrant with bonanza excitement. Its matter was a rumored new fissure at the 2000-foot level in "Mexican" or a rich new ore body discovered in Best & Belcher. The names that made it news were those of John Mackay, Slippery Jim Fair or Nevada's peerless Senator John Percival Jones, hero of the holocaust at Crown Point.

Three quarters of a century after the incredible discovery in Consolidated Virginia that became known as the Big Bonanza, Virginia City is still in the news and the wires and mails that speed its progress are again familiar with the names of C Street, Bonanza Row and the Crystal Chandeliers Saloon.

But the names of the Comstock's personalities are no longer those of the Silver Kings—Fair, Flood, O'Brien and

Adolph Sutro, or even the overlords of the great Bank of California, William Sharon and Darius Ogden Mills. They are the names of such men of letters as Roger Butterfield, Walter Van Tilberg Clark and Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg. Or lady contributors to the coated paper magazines like Katharine Tillyer and Katharine Best. Or professional scholars such as Duncan Emrich, assistant librarian of Congress for American Folklore.

There are nationally famous artists such as Sheldon Penoyer and professional book news reporters like San Francisco's Basil Woon and distinguished literary visitors such as Stewart Holbrook who spent a delighted two days on the Comstock a month or so ago and whose "Yankee Exodus" promises to be one of the important non-fiction items of the early summer book lists.

Once the most celebrated source of silver and gold bullion the world has ever known, Virginia City is now a foundry of beautiful letters, an adverb mill. Literature has taken over where once the mine hoists rumbled and shipments from

the Comstock today are manuscripts of novels, critical essays and historical studies.

Most recent of the arrivals to be installed on Mount Davidson, as Nevada's Mount Parnassus is officially known, is the team of historians and specialists in Western Americana of Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg.

Known for such important contributions to the lore of the old West as "U.S. West, The Saga of Wells Fargo" and their monograph on the Virginia & Truckee Railroad of fragrant memory, Beebe and Clegg have come into possession of the one-time Virginia City home of John Piper of Piper's Opera fame at the corner of A and Union Streets and have set in motion the machinery of their own personal adjective-reducing mill in what amounts to an explosion of Victorian elegance.

The author-photographer team, which functions in interchangeable capacities, first came to Nevada several years ago to take pictures for their now classic "Mixed Train Daily, A Book of Short Line Railroads," the \$12.75 rail collectors' item which became a best seller.

They returned aboard their private railroad car "The Gold Coast" two years ago and spotted it under the cottonwoods of Carson City while they gathered material for their Wells Fargo chronicle, one of the most sumptuous and hilarious corporate histories on record.

Last fall, when it became apparent that the days of their beloved Virginia & Truckee Railroad were numbered—they had meanwhile written its official history in book form published under the title "Virginia & Truckee, A Story of Virginia City and Comstock Times" published by Grahame Hardy of Oakland—they purchased the John Piper House into which they moved in June.

In April, Beebe resigned from the editorial staff of the New York Herald Tribune, where he had served for 22 years variously as city reporter, feature writer, conductor of the famed Sunday "Opposite Editorial Page," drama reporter, editorial contributor and author of the syndicated column "This New York," which was published for many years in The Oakland Tribune, to devote his energies to book and magazine work.

"I've seen the elephant," he says of his 20-odd years as the Tribune's most de luxe reporter, "and now I want to see what's on the other side of the hill. Not Murray Hill, but Gold Hill."

### ELABORATE BATH

To restore John Piper's house, a substantial two-story frame structure with the bay window and ornamental trim so dear to the Victorian heart and a magnificent view down Six Mile Canyon from its bedroom windows, to its original florid magnificence, the new owners retained the same Sunset Boulevard decorator from Hollywood, Robert Hanley, who had arranged the now famous decor of their "Gold Coast."

Crystal chandeliers, archaic electric lighting fixtures, mahogany bedroom sets and looped and fringed araperies were freighted up ninety years ago.

One of the bedrooms was converted into what is probably the most elaborate bath in Nevada and includes not only the accustomed and conventional plumbing but also a plush barber chair, magazine racks, a rocking chair from San Francisco's Palace and a small bar. An elaborate bronze chandelier, also a gift from the Palace, gives the apartment a vaguely ballroom atmosphere.

A feature of the Piper House which never fails to attract the attention of visitors when they

have admired the Earl of Jersey's chandelier in the front hall and the Victorian barber chair in the upstairs bath, is the front hall hatrack. Beebe is to the world of men's hats approximately what Hudda Hopper is to the world of women's chapeaux.

### VARIETY OF HATS

When last inventoried, the hatrack blossomed with a gray top hat of racetrack fashion, a coonskin cap with four skins in its tail which was presented Beebe by the staff of the Herald Tribune when he came West, a broad plainsman's sombrero or Mormon, a bowler, an opera hat and a deerstalker or wideawake of the sort traditionally affected by Sherlock Holmes. The hall closet revealed a silk top hat, a cloth travelling cap of exclamatory pattern, two Homburgs and a red hunting cap.

Scrutiny of the Beebe-Clegg library is also revealing. Aside from a formidable bibliography of Western Americana, Californiana and railroad histories, it is characterized by a curious melange of the classical humanities and modern authors. Plato sits cheek by jowl with the complete works of Gene Fowler. There are Pindar's "Odes to Victory" in the original Greek, Kipling, Swinburne, Dowson and "Mrs. Astor's Horse" by Stanley Walker, Beebe's old city editor.

Spelling, Beebe admits, is not his strong point and his work desk is equipped with English, Spanish, French, German and Latin dictionaries and the Official Railroad Guide.

### 'WEST IS BEST'

"Both Mr. Clegg and I feel very strongly that the West is the only thinkable place for us to live and practice our profession which is, essentially, that of the historian," says Beebe. "And the best of the West seems to be represented, to our taste anyway, by Nevada, California is, of course, possessed of many advantages and San Francisco is the dream city of the world, but you have a preposterous tax structure in California and then again it's full of people. They're everywhere."

"Now here in Nevada there is only one resident for every 40 square miles and that's just about right. A little overpopulated but not offensively so. We can drive the 400 miles more or less to Vegas and not meet more than five or six other cars and that's just about perfect."

The current excitement in the literary lives of Beebe and Clegg is the publication this month under the imprimatur of



"1949ers" Lucius Beebe (right) and Charles Clegg, author-photographer team, recalled Greeley's sage words and left pulchre of New York for wide open spaces of Nevada. Here the writers of "Mixed Train Daily," and "Virginia and Truckee," compare notes on forthcoming book, "Ghosts With Six Guns," in Victorian elegance of Virginia City home.

Grahame Hardy of Oakland of "Legends of the Comstock Lode," a volume of informal essays on aspects of the Comstock both past and present.

"We have no pretensions to contributing anything new or original to the Nevada story," says the authors. "Simply we thought it would be a good thing to collect in a single volume a number of the sagas of Virginia City and the Comstock region which are not altogether available either in a single book or in popular form. If the book is any success at all as much credit goes to E. S. Hammack, who did the atmospheric decorations, as to the authors."

"Now that this is off our hands we're devoting our energies to a book of ghost towns, probably to be called "Ghosts With Six Guns" which our New York publisher, Dutton, has scheduled for the fall of next year. It will include profiles or

character studies of the past and present of such places as Virginia City and Tonopah in Nevada, Bodie and Panamint in California and in Colorado, Central City, Georgetown, Telluride and Silverton."

The transition from the top hats and tailcoats of New York's night clubs and first nights at the theater has been accomplished with a minimum of friction and discomfort by Nevada's literary newcomers.

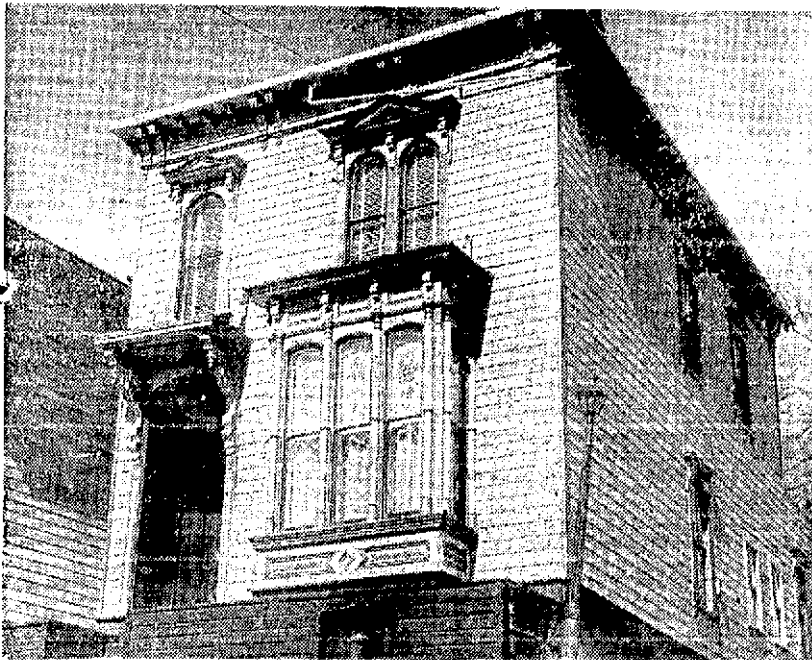
"New York just isn't an American city any longer," says Beebe. "It is a suburb of Europe, its newspapers are nothing so much as foreign language publications insofar as they are printed in English."

"The last of the American colony in New York are fighting a losing battle, like Custer at the Little Big Horn. They are in a hollow square at the Colony and Jack and Charlie's but sooner or later they will be

wiped out. We knew it was time to get out and we oiled up the Conestoga wagon and headed west. At least in Nevada we don't have to ask for our bourbon in French."

"That Beebe and Clegg have been pretty well assimilated into their adopted state is demonstrated by the circumstance that last fall they were asked to write the historical pageant which was presented at Carson City on Admission Day and this spring Beebe delivered the address at the University of Nevada's annual celebration of Mackay Day in honor of the memory of John Mackay.

"Keep the old things as they are in Nevada," he told his auditors. "The past is an asset. Visitors to Nevada in search of a bit of the old West's atmosphere will take a dim view of things if all they are able to find is a little of the atmosphere of the new Hollywood."



"Carpenter Gothic" facade of old John Piper house in Virginia City carries out mood of bonanza days literary renaissance fathered by Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg who first came West in palatial private rail car "Gold Coast." Bathroom of house, most elaborate in Nevada, includes barber chair and a bar. Photos from Grahame Hardy, Oakland.