

II.

Saloons – Hotels

DURING THE EARLIEST days of the American occupation of California a legend grew up that held that the northern part of San Mateo County was an area that tolerated hard drinking and gambling. It was a legend based on some realities and upon many exaggerations.

Saloons and roadhouses were among the first business concerns to be established in old Colma. By 1888 more than 4 percent of the men of Colma who were listed in the **Great Register of San Mateo County** were saloon keepers or bartenders. Two years later, in 1890, **Polk's Business Directory** listed six saloons among the twenty business concerns in the area. By 1915 the number of saloons and business houses that served liquor had grown to fifteen out of forty-nine concerns.¹

These saloons varied from a counter in the rear of a store to a large building devoted to the distribution of spirits. While many are remembered to this day, only a few can be mentioned here. One of them was the White House Gardens, that occupied a building that had been one of Colma's first stores. After passing through several hands, it was occupied by James Casey and was known as the White House.

Across the street on Mission and Market Streets stood a ramshackle saloon known as Sweeney's. In the early days it was purchased by Michael Fay, Sr., who in turn sold it to George M. Collopy. Eventually Mr. Collopy built a large brown shake building that was used for dances and other forms of entertainment. Long after its proprietor's death, Collopy's Hall stood as a landmark of the area's history. It was torn down in 1970, one hundred years after its builder opened his first saloon on that site.

Another landmark was the Abbey House that stood at the top of Daly's Hill and gave its name to all the area in the vicinity of San Jose Avenue and Mission Street.

Still another was the Villa Hotel which featured a restaurant that was as well known as its bar.

The Northern was a roadhouse that was owned by J.W. Marchbank and was reminiscent of the Northern Club that he kept in Alaska during its gold rush days.

Writing of such saloons, George Kirchhubel, himself the proprietor of a tavern on Mission Street, says,

Mission Street had a good many saloons in those days, starting with the Abbey House on Top of the Hill, to the Lawndale next to Millett's Hotel and world famous training quarters adjacent to the cemeteries. Each saloon was famous for its special Sunday dinner, and each outdid the other with special dishes it was noted for. There was also free lunch for those looking for a snack. This consisted of various cuts of meats and cheeses together with a variety of sliced breads.

Many an old timer has said that this [Mission Street] was the finest mile and a half of eating and drinking found anywhere in the country.²



MISSION BAR, MISSION STREET—DALY CITY—OWNED BY ISRAEL POKET



POKET'S SALOON, TOP-OF-THE-HILL—1909