

# **A Tour Through The Western Marble Regions**

## **Part III**

By George C. Underhill

*In Stone: An Illustrated Magazine*, December 1895

This article, which begins on the next page,  
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## **“A Tour Through The Western Marble Regions, Part III” (in Nevada & California)**

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“Just why the creating power suspended operations on Nevada after four days no man can know, unless it be that extra time was allotted to Beautyland beyond the Sierras; but that the finishing touches are lacking goes without saying. Sage brush and Piute Indians are in evidence to show the creative made-from-nothing feature to be a fact there as elsewhere. They show the possibilities of the Deity’s hand, and that is about all...and the sage brush will not even burn well. But the law of compensation steps in with an adjuster, so to say. There is no great demand for this land, hence the weary tramp on his annual pilgrimage to the land of free raw material beyond the Sierras can camp without fear of being ordered to fold his jute bag tent and crawl. Again, we that have naught but sins to be remembered by can emulate Mr. Robinson Crusoe in the Monarch-of-All-I-Survey business and leave our loved ones a heritage after all, and this without price. Surely this privilege will make dying easier for many a poor soul; providing, of course, that they do the Monarch act by proxy, else the heartache would return with the first survey.

“There is an old legend that tells us of a bankrupt lord, who, on his death-bed, in great secrecy (sic), bequeathed to his weeping children a beautiful stone, telling them that in spite of adversity he had retained this gem for their inheritance, and that it was his wish that it be considered an heirloom to be handed down from one generation to another, but that the world was never to know of the vast wealth thus left until such time as actual want compelled them to part with it. Many generations were made wealthy by this secret treasure, though it was proven valueless when an attempt was made to vend it. Lack of time and space bar me from formulating a moral that would jibe with all this, if, indeed, there is any moral about it other than that we of the East can by the same process leave our children a heritage, – an estate in far-away Nevada.

“At Marmol, some miles up the Truckee river from Reno and on the Central Pacific railroad, the writer visited the marble mill of the Inyo Marble Company, an up-to-date establishment with gangs for sawing, rubbing beds, lathes, moulding machines, buffers, etc., all driven by an A1 water power. Blocks are hauled here from Keeler (referred to in my last paper) and the finished product is principally shipped to the coast for all the uses to which marble is put. And I may say that some of the most elaborate work, both decorating and memorial, on the continent, can be found in California.

“Continuing our journey up the river we arrive at Truckee, just on the line between Nevada and California, and stop over to visit the famous rocking stone, located inside the village limits, just north of the railway station on a steep incline. In a word, a large egg-shaped boulder, perhaps twenty-five feet in diameter, standing on end, serves as a pedestal for another of about the same

shape, weighing perhaps twenty tons, which is so nicely balanced that a slight push of one hand sets it to rocking to and fro. Both stones show wear, presumably glacial, but just how they chanced to get into their present relative positions it is hard to surmise, especially in view of their location on a mountain-side.

“The next train takes us over the mountain through forty miles of snow sheds, for all the world like a long rock tunnel, only more so.

“On our way down the far side of the range we pass through the greatest placer mining district in the world. For miles nearly the whole natural surface of the land has been washed away, often to a depth of fifty feet; and it is said that nearly 10 per cent of all the gold in existence has been taken from the sluices in this one county.

“We pass Rockville,\* with its granite quarries, just before pulling into Sacramento; and learn that much may be expected from this stock in the future, as the quantity is unlimited and the quality could be no better for most purposes. (\* “Rockville” probably refers to “Rocklin in Placer County.”)

“Everything in California is practically new, as the reader knows. All her industries, aside from gold-mining, have been created within a few years – scarcely any of them dating back two decades – and yet this state, that in length covers a distance equal to that from Vermont to Illinois, is an empire in everything but the lack of an emperor; and so long as C. P. Huntington lives, the state has a large claim to even this honor. We of the East have known about California for a generation. We have been told that she has gold and Chinamen, big ranches and big trees; and latterly we have learned that oranges and wines were got in some sort of way over there. But few of us know that she is actually producing a greater variety of stones and minerals than any state in the Union; that she can put dressed beef in the market cheaper than any other civilized people; that she has every variety of climate within her domain – perpetual snow and almost perpetual rain, and likewise perpetual no rain, while in some of the foothills they have New England climate to a T. Yes, the same changes of season, summer and winter, storm and sunshine, all bunched together “hither-skilter,” as the Democrats say.

“Paradise? Yes, that is the place just back of National City, near San Diego. T’was so in fact, and so the signboard reads at the fork of the road.

“But, says Editor Ranck, when he reads this: What are you getting at anyhow? Democrats and then Paradise, 500 miles from where you left us at Sacramento? I beg pardon. We, the unworthy cuckoos of Grover, are more than 500 miles away from the Paradise that he promised us – we that should hold fast in the faith – and we must walk all the way in a road full of glass and stubble, and our shoes are innocuous. I was sort of looking ahead, horoscoping a little, thinking of one thing and writing another – hence the break; but it is just as well. We will look about the extreme southwest corner of the United States a little and forget our woes.

“Well, there is no marble just here, but Mr. Frank Kimball and Mr. E. L. Matott stand ready to show the most beautiful samples from near Victor, east of San Bernardino. And truth to tell, they have valuable deposits that have been worked a little, and Mr. Kimball has sawn some of his stock at a small mill just out of San Diego. These marbles are after the serpentine order, with varieties by the dozen, and every one an improvement. President Grant’s son Jesse recently built a home in San Diego, and he used this marble for a large mantel in the living room therein and

elsewhere. Mr. Grant told the writer that this stock was selected from many samples submitted in competition for the work as being the most unique, and I could hardly imagine a richer stone.

“In company with Messrs. Grant and Kimball I visited the Sweetwater Dam, one of the finest pieces of mason work on the continent, forming a storage for the city water supply. Also the ranch near by of H. G. Root, of the old marble firm of Kent & Root, at Dorset, Vt. San Diego and National City on the mainland and Coronado Beach to the west of the harbor, with the San Bernardino mountains in the background, make a pretty picture, not unlike those of Naples, that we have seen.

“Next a trip to Los Angeles and Santa Barbara and up to Riverside, where we find another marble outfit. The Messrs. Dyer, bankers here, have extensively developed quarries at Colton just out of the city, and have built a full-fledged marble mill near by; though because of the hard times it is not in operation. A most peculiar formation, this at Colton, rising out of a fairly level plain, extending from San Bernardino to the coast range of mountains, we see a huge butte, or pinnacle, perhaps 700 feet high, nearly round, and mostly bare of vegetation or soil. One-half the peak is dolomite and the other half cement rock. This marble (dolomite) has a nearly white ground, here and there merging into a dove blue, with dark and light blue dappling and veins. The entire mass has been coarsely broken by eruptive forces, and to such an extent as to raise the question of possibilities in producing at reasonable cost such sizes as would likely be called for in large building work. Several marble men from the East have suggested this as an unfavorable feature, and it cannot be gainsaid. But the quarries are not plenty anywhere that can supply the sizes already taken from the east side of this deposit. I saw at Riverside, and at the San Francisco Museum of Natural History, perfect slabs twelve feet long, of various widths and thicknesses. Moreover, there was a block at the quarry fully thirty feet long, without a blemish. Of course to the eye accustomed to see only “dry” and other close breaks and flaws, the open fissures filled with disintegrated stone have an ominous look. However, a break is a break, and it matters little when once it occurs whether it be wide open or only started. Hence my belief (sic) that the quarries at Colton have a place with the good properties. Mr. John Dyer has in course of erection at Riverside a very elaborate mausoleum from this marble that would be a credit to any quarry in Vermont or Georgia.

“Aside from some onyx near San Luis Obispo, which is only worked in a small way, there is no high grade stone between Los Angeles and Tres Pinos near Monterey. At this place of Pines there is another dolomite deposit of a somewhat similar character to the Colton, but it has never been worked except for lime purposes; and just what the result would be in case it was is conjectural, of course, though through freight protection (about \$2 a foot from the East) it is worth trying. Mr. J. J. Burt, of San Jose made a strong effort to develop the property some years ago, both for lime and other uses, and went so far as to build a motor railroad from the South Pacific system to the quarry, but panicky times and one misfortune after another caused him to suspend operations.

“Being near Monterey I was tempted to visit that famous spot, and I shall never regret having done so. Located at the southerly end of Monterey harbor, 130 miles down the coast from San Francisco, this quaint old Spanish town holds forth and bids all the world to come and see its wares of vision and listen to their most infernal prevaricated and perforated stories. In the old town there is a mission and church built, so say they, about 115 years ago. Stopping at the church gate we inquire as to its history and the care-taker. “Yes,” said he, “115 years, and a peon who aided in its construction still lives to corroborate the story of religious conquest.” He also casually told me that the original missionary has been dead but a few months. Extending a cordial invitation to step inside and see the church relics, he called my attention to the walk made of mastodon bones, cut in lengths and set on end like wooden paving blocks. Entering the

church, my man commenced telling lies in dead earnest. This candlestick came from King Solomon's temple, and that picture from St. Peter's in Rome. This article was captured by Constantine fourteen years before anyone knew it. Well, to make it short, I was told in English that a contribution was in order, and of the little that Grover had left me, I brought forth a quarter. And then I was informed in sign language that a tip would be appreciated. Well, he got another quarter, and then I told him in Yankee dialect that he was a "darned imposition."

"The Hotel Del Monte, just out of Monterey, will be a beauty and joy so long as the Southern Pacific lamp continues to burn – a Queen Anne building that would look well at the entrance to Central Park, New York, surrounded by hundreds of acres of foliage and flowers that one can well believe have no equal on earth. The climate makes it possible to grow every shrub, tree and posy that is known to woman, and forty Chinamen spend year in and out caring for this pink of places. Just one drawback, and scratchback-fleas!

"Around to Santa Cruz at the north end of Monterey harbor and on to San Jose, via the narrow gauge railroad that leads through the big redwood forest. Trees 200 to 300 feet to the first limb, straight as a gun barrel and large enough to build a house inside at the base.

"From San Jose, the big town of the Santa Clara valley, the run to San Francisco is short and the same evening finds us at the 'Baldwin' of Lucky fame. Next morning we cross Market street and saunter down to the famous Palace Hotel to see undoubtedly the finest sidewalk of any extent in the world. All about the Palace the walk is tiled with fine marble that looks exactly like the best light-veined Italian. These slabs are perhaps eight feet long by four wide – as I remember them – and must be quite hard, as the wear of twenty years on the principal street in the city has left them little worse for it. The quarry from which this stock came is owned by the Columbia Marble Company, and is located in Amador county, south of Stockton. Owing to the great railway strike which was 'on' I did not visit this county, much to my regret. It is said that there are enormous quantities of every grade and texture there; and monuments and decorative work that was shown me in San Francisco and Oakland lead me to believe that extensive marble operations will some day be a feature of Amador county. Unfortunately there is no railroad near this marble territory, and a haul of some forty or fifty miles puts a ban on its extensive development until such time as better transportation facilities are available. However, the Amador Marble Company, of Oakland, are at present doing some work, and others contemplate making the attempt. (*"Amador County" should be "Tuolumne County."*)

"Yes, I like California, but, 'though the grass grows as green (in spots) and the moon shines as bright, yet it is not my own native land.'

*"Geo. C. Underhill."*

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*(See the next page for links to some of the stone quarries on our web site, Stone Quarries and Beyond, that are mentioned in the article above.)*

Below are links on our web site, Stone Quarries and Beyond, to some of the quarry areas mentioned in the 1895 account above:

1. **Inyo Marble Company Quarries**, today F. W. Aggregates, located near Lone Pine, Inyo County, CA (These quarries were historically referred to as “marble” quarries, but today they are solely referred to as “dolomite” quarries.  
[http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry\\_photo/ca-inyo\\_photos\\_2.html](http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry_photo/ca-inyo_photos_2.html)
2. **Rocklin Granite Quarries**, Placer County, CA  
[http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry\\_photo/ca-placer\\_photos\\_2a.html](http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry_photo/ca-placer_photos_2a.html)
3. **Victorville Marble/Serpentine Quarries**, San Bernardino County, CA (*Scroll down to “Victorville, California....”*)  
[http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry\\_photo/ca-san\\_bernardino\\_photos3.html](http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry_photo/ca-san_bernardino_photos3.html)
4. **Sweetwater Dam Quarry**, San Diego County, CA  
[http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry\\_photo/ca-san\\_diego\\_sweetwater\\_dam\\_quarry.html](http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry_photo/ca-san_diego_sweetwater_dam_quarry.html)
5. **San Diego Quarries**, San Diego County, CA  
[http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry\\_photo/ca-san\\_diego\\_photos.html](http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry_photo/ca-san_diego_photos.html)
6. **Colton Marble Quarries**, San Bernardino County, CA  
[http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry\\_photo/ca-san\\_bernardino\\_photos2.html](http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry_photo/ca-san_bernardino_photos2.html)
7. **Tres Pinos Limestone Quarries**, San Benito County, CA (*Scroll down to “Tres Pinos, San Benito County, California....”*)  
[http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry\\_photo/ca-san\\_benito\\_photos.html](http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry_photo/ca-san_benito_photos.html)
8. **Columbia Marble Company Quarries**, Columbia, Tuolumne County  
[http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry\\_photo/ca-tuolumne\\_photos\\_1.html](http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry_photo/ca-tuolumne_photos_1.html)
9. **Amador Marble Company in Oakland / Marble Quarries** in Amador County, CA  
[http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry\\_photo/ca-amador\\_quarries.html](http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry_photo/ca-amador_quarries.html)