



California Missions
Keeping the Past Present

California Stories

A Friendship Formed in Chocolate



The California Stories are a collection of interesting and historical stories from early California and the California Missions written by David J. McLaughlin.



A Friendship Formed in Chocolate

The delicious product of two immigrants, James Lick and Domingo Ghirardelli.

James Lick arrived in San Francisco - then known as Yerba Buena - in January 1848 when the population was barely 1,000. Lick had acquired a modest fortune as a piano maker, fur trader and entrepreneur in Argentina, Chile, and Peru in the years 1821-1847. The wily Lick used that money to buy land in San Francisco, carefully calculating the logical direction of the city's expansion, and built a fortune.



James Lick (1796-1876)



*Domingo Ghirardelli
(1817-1894)*

One of Lick's friends and neighbors in Peru was a man named Domingo Ghirardelli. Domenico (Domingo was the name he used in Peru) was born in 1817 near Genoa, Italy. He learned the confectionery trade as a young man. Like his friend James Lick, he had immigrated to South America. Ghirardelli had moved first to Uruguay, then Peru where he had a successful confectionery business.



*View of San Francisco (then known as Yerba Buena) in 1846,
courtesy of Library of Congress*

James Lick had brought 600 pounds of Ghirardelli's chocolates with him to California, which he quickly converted to cash. He urged Ghirardelli to come to California and "get into the chocolate business". Ghirardelli sailed to San Francisco but the lure of striking it rich in the gold rush diverted him for several years. In 1852, he finally did open up a "candy" store. He soon had several outlets and the business grew.

In 1893, Ghirardelli and his two sons thought big and bought a city block of bay-side property along North Point Street. Ghirardelli Square still contains the old buildings that formed the core of the Ghirardelli family business for over sixty years.



*Photograph of Ghirardelli Square, by Carol Highsmith,
courtesy of Library of Congress*

James Lick was a man of many interests and talents, and he was quite successful in California. From 1852-1855, he built a flour mill in San Jose which was said to have produced the best flour in the West. He also imported rare and beautiful trees from all parts of the world.

Lick also built one of the Bay area's first luxury hotels in San Francisco. He had a keen interest in science and near the end of his life, he founded the Lick Observatory at Mt. Hamilton, near San Jose, and donated what was then the largest telescope ever made.



Lick Observatory, 1900, Appleton & Co.