

COMMUNITY

California's oldest bookseller originated in Shasta

By Jeremy Tuggle
shs@shastahistorical.org

GOLD AND LORE

SHASTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A man named Anton Roman, formerly of Bavaria, arrived in California in 1849 and settled at Shasta in 1850. He worked at the nearby placer mines earning his fortune, also mining on the Trinity and Klamath rivers.

Roman was a well-educated person who loved to read and he dreamed of establishing a bookstore to share his passion for books. His dream became a reality in 1851 when he established Roman's Books in Shasta.

On June 14, 1853, a fire turned Shasta's business district to ashes within 33 minutes from the start of the fire. The fire started about 5 p.m. in the Parker House and it was a major loss to the entire community. Roman lost a total of \$4,000 worth of inventory that night. Although the fire was devastating, eventually Roman recovered.

Two years later, Roman re-established his store as the Shasta Book Store in a brand new fireproof

brick building called Callaghan's Block, and it was located on Main Street. He rented the department store from brothers Jeremiah and Daniel Callaghan. By 1856, Roman had opened another branch of his bookstore, formerly called Shasta Butte City, on Cohen's Block in Yreka.

In 1857, Roman opened a branch of his bookstore in San Francisco and started publishing books in 1863.

Roman was married on June 3, 1864, in San Francisco to Eliza K. Fletcher. The newlyweds returned to Shasta briefly and then they relocated back to San Francisco.

They had two children, Cornelius Roman and Nettie Roman. In 1868, Roman began publishing the popular Overland Monthly, a California-based magazine that was edited by his friend, famous writer and

poet Bret Harte.

Roman and his family were still living in San Francisco in 1870 and this is where his children grew up and were educated. Roman kept close ties with his friends in Shasta and he visited the area frequently, especially on business trips. The 1880 U.S. Census lists his occupation as a book publisher, and eight years later he was dabbling in real estate. The pioneer continued both jobs into the 20th century, until he died on June 23, 1903. He was 79 years old.

Roman is buried in the Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland. His wife survived him and later died in San Francisco on March 21, 1925 at the age of 79. Their children continued living in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Roman, the noted California bookseller, had an amazing legacy that survived him and his bookstore. Although the business changed owners over the years, it remains one of the oldest businesses in San Francisco, according to Books Inc. On its



PHOTO COURTESY OF JEREMY TUGGLE

This sign marks the historic site of the Callaghan's Block in Shasta. The Shasta Book Store owned and operated by Anton Roman would have been one of three stores located on this lot inside Callaghan's Block. The sign was placed by the Shasta State Historic Park. This photograph was taken on May 26, 2016.

website, it states: "Books Inc.'s origin dates back to the Gold Rush days of 1851 when Anton Roman struck it rich in Shasta, California, and set himself up in business selling books. That small bookstore

was moved, bought, sold, burned, rebuilt, renamed and became Books Inc., as we know it today in 1946."

That's quite an achievement for California's oldest bookseller, which includes a Shasta connection. There

is a timeline on the website, as well, which documents every change the business experienced since being founded by Roman.

Jeremy Tuggle works at the Shasta Historical Society.