

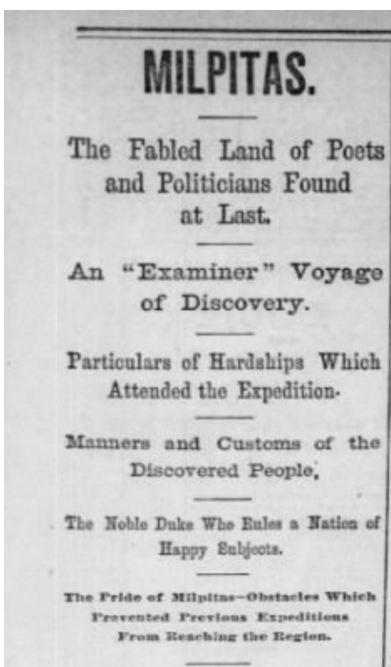
AS GOES MILPITAS, SO GOES THE STATE...

...and so the ridicule begins!

Milpitas has long been an underdog, but for over 100 years it was the most famous one in the country! It all started one evening in 1863, during the U.S. Civil War. Reverend Thomas Starr King, of San Francisco's Unitarian church, was a firm abolitionist and supporter of the Union cause. During this time, there was talk of California possibly joining the Confederacy, and Rev. King came down to San Jose to give a speech in support of staying in the Union.

During his speech, an enthusiastic Milpitan, whose name is not known, projected a magic lantern slide on the wall that stated "As Goes Milpitas, So Goes the State" - a big statement from such a small town! The many attendees had a chuckle, but the press spread the story far and wide; the legend of the "Man from Milpitas" was born, an uneducated hick with a laughable level of self-importance.

The jokes soon started: "A man from Milpitas walks into a bar..."

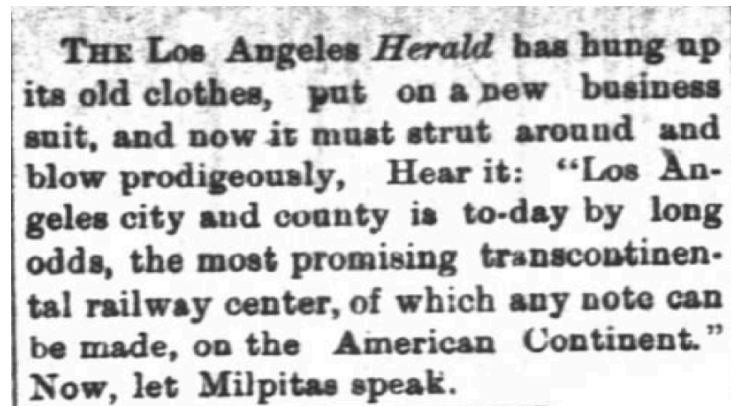
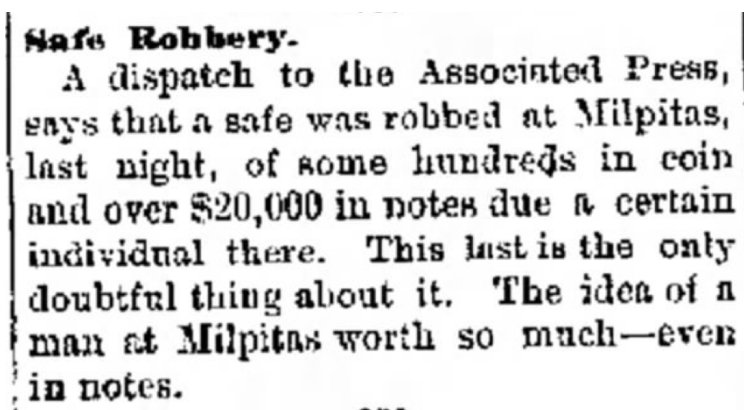


Newspapers around the country started running amusing fictional stories about Milpitas, in the same way people in the next century would think of "Timbuktu" or "Podunk". It wasn't a passing fad, either; for the next 80 years or so, our little town was the punchline of many jokes, stories, and limericks!

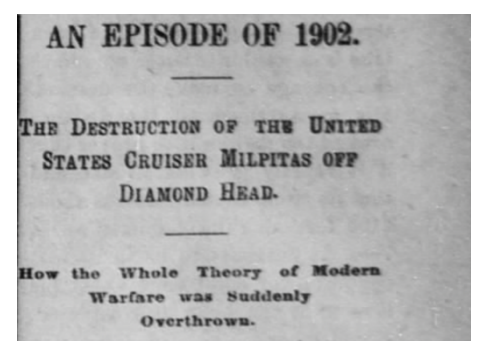
The clipping to the left is from the San Francisco Examiner of April 24, 1887, decades after the original incident, and by this time everyone had most likely forgotten *why* Milpitas was to be picked on, only that it was the setting of the absurd and hilarious adventures of a city of dull-witted citizens.

People seemed fascinated by this place, the fictional stories got more detailed – the clipping shown to the left is only the headlines to three whole columns of the front page of the San Francisco Examiner. Valuable real estate indeed!

The Oakland Tribune seemed to have the most fun ribbing its neighbor to the south. For decades, they would even sneak jabs into serious articles. They did this hundreds if not thousands of times over the years - here are just a couple examples from the 1870s:



Newspapers from Hawaii to Maine, down through the South and the American Heartland - everyone jumped on the bandwagon. The headline on the right is the beginning of a long story printed in The Hawaiian Gazette of September 1, 1891. A science fiction story set in the futuristic year of 1902, it tells of the tribulations of the "USS Milpitas" – with that name, the reader knows it is doomed from the start!



There was a young girl of Milpitas,
Who had an attack of bronchitis,
And she said, "I shall cough
My infernal head off,
If I don't get out of Milpitas."

Newspapers weren't the only ones participating in the sport – the word "Milpitas" might be slipped into a theater production when they felt a laugh was needed. Limericks mentioning our fair city were also prevalent at the beginning of the 20th century, this one comes from a 1904 pocket book, also being one of the more "family friendly" examples.

This tradition continued through Vaudeville, as well as with comedians up through the 1950s who would bring up Milpitas from time to time. The last recorded national jab at Milpitas came on the children's show "Sesame Street" in 1969. Obviously inserted by older writers to entertain grandparents who were watching the show with their grandchildren, you can still find this clip on YouTube by Googling "Sesame Street" and "Milpitas" together. It happens around 1 minute and 55 seconds into the video.

Of course, Milpitas never deserved that reputation, but most people here took it with a laugh, knowing what we have always had here. Had one proud citizen not projected those 7 words on a wall in 1863, we would have had a different history, but maybe not as fun!