

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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1931 GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY 1981

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The Editor and Staff for *Noticias* are pleased to join the Monterey History and Art Association's Golden Anniversary celebrations in 1981. We have chosen singularly momentous events in local and California history to remember, and we shall pay tribute to very special people who opened our eyes to our heritage and made our area and history exciting. This issue recaptures the drama of events attending the formal taking of California by United States forces in 1846, and honors Laura Bride Powers.



Raising of the American Flag and taking possession of California by Commodore John Drake Sloat, U.S. Navy, at Monterey, July 7, 1846.

The raising of the United States flag in Monterey on July 7, 1846, whereby Commodore John Drake Sloat, commander of the American naval forces in the Pacific, took formal possession of California, stands as a great moment in our local history. Its portent for national history was no less great. A monumental conquest was achieved

without actual fighting, with slight exceptions. As John Bidwell wrote: "We simply marched all over California from Sonoma to San Diego and raised the American flag without opposition or protest. We tried to find an enemy but could not." However, this ease of conquest came only after a period of painful anxieties, stresses, and uncertainties on the part of several key Americans. For months the problem of geographically separate yet concurrent events, isolated by no communications, or hampered by untimely or poor ones, held in suspense the fateful raising of the United States flag on July 7, 1846. The situation is put into perspective below.

SLOAT'S DILEMMA

It was July 7, 1846 and Commodore John Drake Sloat stood on the deck of his flagship, anxiously watching 225 marines and sailors from the U.S.S. SAVANNAH, CYANE, AND LEVANT approach the Monterey shore. Immediately upon landing they marched to the Custom House, where most of the townspeople, quiet and apprehensive, had assembled to hear Rodman M. Price, the Purser from the CYANE, read a proclamation written by Commodore Sloat. "*The central government of Mexico, having commenced hostilities against the United States of America . . . The two nations being actually at war . . . I shall hoist the standard of the United States at Monterey immediately, and shall carry it throughout California. I declare to the inhabitants of California that . . . I do not come among them as an enemy to California but on the contrary, I come as their best friend . . .*"

Sloat's situation prior to this moment was not that he lacked courage, or worried about forces he might encounter but that he lacked recent official orders. He had received reliable unofficial reports that a battle had occurred at the Rio Grande. But had war been declared? Had it ended? With these questions unanswered he also took into consideration that four years earlier, Commodore Thomas ap Catesby Jones had prematurely hoisted the Stars and Stripes in Monterey and then withdrawn in embarrassment. Sloat hesitated to put himself and his country in this position.

He had left his anchorage at Mazatlan on June 7th, upon hearing of the encounter at the border of the two countries. This was in response to year-old instructions from George Bancroft, Secretary of the Navy "*. . . to protect the persons and interests of the citizens of the United States near your station; and should you ascertain, beyond a doubt, that the Mexican Government has declared war against us, you will at once deploy the force under your command to the best advantage. . . .*"

That Sloat had anticipated the battle at the Rio Grande is evident from an entry in the journal of Karl Theodore Hartwig, a botanist in the employ of the Horticultural Society of London. In March he noted that he wanted to go to Monterey. "*I applied to Commodore Sloat for passage . . . I was told by him . . . that he could not serve me, that under the present circumstances, when a rupture between the United States and Mexico was hourly expected, he could not let his movements be known . . .*"

Sloat's uncertainty was not lessened after consultation with Thomas O. Larkin, U.S. Consul in Monterey. Together they weighed reports from the Rio Grande and those from Sonoma, where Fremont had started the Bear Flag Rebellion. Also on their minds was the imminent possibility that the British Admiral, Sir George Seymour, might appear and take advantage of their indecisiveness to establish a British protectorate over California.

The Commodore faced a true dilemma. He finally decided that he would rather be "*sacrificed for doing too much rather than too little . . .*"

His decision to land was the proper one, an historic event celebrated again fifty years

later when the cornerstone of the Sloat Monument was laid in Monterey. The event was commemorated next in 1931 under sponsorship of the Monterey History and Art Association which has continued to do so annually, except during war years.

J. Clifford Gallant



THE BEAR FLAG REVOLT

During the first half of the 19th Century emigrants from the United States to Mexican California fell roughly in two categories, connected but not united by belief in their country's destiny as a democratic trans-continental power.

Americans who had arrived by sea over a period of years, settled near port towns and often married into hispanic families, were convinced that only legal annexation to the United States could solve the problems arising from absentee Mexican rule. In Monterey, Consul General Larkin worked quietly toward this end among influential Californios, while off the coast the American Pacific Squadron pursued a course of watchful waiting.

The second group came overland, products of the expanding frontier. First mountain men in fringed buckskins, then a few hardy farm families jolted through the passes in their covered wagons, looked at the wide untenanted land, moved in and helped themselves.

These rugged individualists brought with them a strong sense of personal freedom, determination to be governed by their own interpretation of American law, and had little contact with Californios.

In early 1846 the diplomatic tactics of the coastal community were thrown off base by increased rumors of a Mexican-American war in Texas and the maneuvers of Colonel John Charles Fremont's well armed "scientific exploration" expedition. After a confrontation with General Jose Castro near Monterey, Fremont withdrew into Oregon, but the country was by now a-buzz with rumor.

By June inland settlers found it easy to believe that Castro was mounting an attack to drive out all foreigners who had not become Mexican citizens. There were memories of the deportation of a number of Americans a few years earlier; Fremont had returned and camped near Sacramento; and finally, a herd of horses being driven to Santa Clara for Castro looked suspiciously like preparation. A small group of settlers led by Ezekial Merritt intercepted the drive, let the vaqueros go, and took the animals to Fremont.

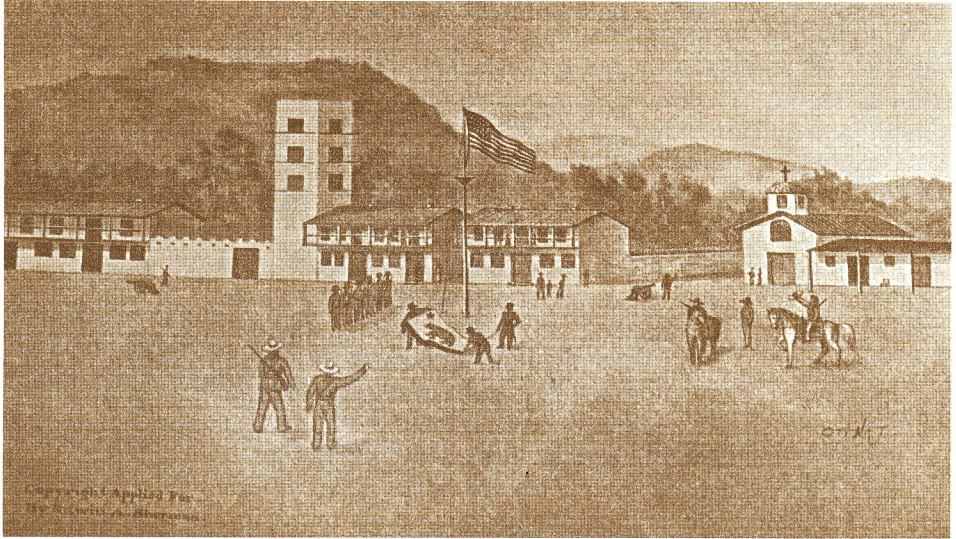
Exactly what the Colonel promised or counselled was not recorded at the time. Nevertheless the thirty frontiersmen who rode to Sonoma on June 13th felt they had his tacit approval. At dawn on the morning of the 14th they aroused the astonished, strongly pro-American General Mariano Vallejo, announced that they had captured the town with its disused fort, and that he was a prisoner.

Following the custom of his people, the amiable Vallejo invited in a delegation composed of Merritt, Robert Semple and William Knight, broke out the aguadiente and sat down to discuss capitulation.

Eventually those outside grew restless, deposed Merritt and sent in John Grigsby and finally William Ide. The latter, a teetotaler, found that "the aguadiente had done its work".

Ide scrapped the casual arrangements made by the first delegation and sent Vallejo, his brother, American brother-in-law, and Captain Victor Prudhom to Fremont under guard. And then, to his astonishment, the pro-American General Vallejo found himself locked up in Sutter's Fort until August. It was not Fremont's finest hour.

Following the example of the founders of the Republic of Texas in 1836, the little band now went about legalization. Ide drew up a statement of principles preliminary to a regular constitution while his followers prepared a flag designed by William Todd. This five by eight foot piece of unbleached muslin was embellished by a five pointed star, a strip of red flannel, and the words "California Republic" and — above all — the rather porcine figure of a grizzly bear.



The lowering of the Bear Flag and the raising of the American flag at Sonoma, California, at 12M., July 9, 1846, by Lieut. Joseph Warren Revere, U.S.N., by order of Commodore John Drake Sloat, U.S.N., commanding the Pacific Squadron.

Thus the "Bear Flag Republic" came into being, the Founding Fathers being nicknamed Bears — Osos in Spanish — and for a short time Ide had the heady experience of becoming the Great Bear.

In this capacity he duly alerted — and alarmed — Captain John B. Montgomery, who had been stationed in San Francisco Bay by Commodore John D. Sloat, Commander of the Pacific Squadron. Officialdom had no desire for an explosion in California's backyard, particularly one with Colonel Fremont's apparent backing.

For the Colonel had finally declared himself, riding into Sonoma on about the 23rd of June, taking over summarily from Ide and consolidating the rebels with his own force. To the end of his days Ide felt ill-used, with some reason.

As a matter of fact, nothing very cataclysmic happened. There was some skirmishing, notably with a contingent led by Joaquin de la Torre of Monterey who easily eluded his pursuers. Two other incidents were uglier: the brutal killing of two Americans carrying gun powder to Sonoma followed by the retaliatory execution of three innocent Californios by Fremont's chief guide, Kit Carson.

On July 7th, 1846, Commodore Sloat raised the flag at Monterey. Two days later it quietly replaced the homemade banner in Sonoma. The Bears shed their skins and turned back to pioneering, as useful to California as their coastline compatriots. There were rough times ahead, but for the moment, two kinds of Americans stood united, with a sense of destiny fulfilled.

Betty Patchin Greene

The Bear Flag, which flew from June 14 to July 9, 1846, provides a side story of special interest. Benjamin Dewell, a member of the little band of "Bears" said:

"The flag was made in the front room of the barracks, just at the left of the door, and most of the sewing was done by myself. 'Bill' Todd painted the bear and star with black ink. The colors — Red, white and blue — were used because they were the colors of the United States flag. The bear was selected as representing the strongest animal found in that section of the country. The language of the flag was: 'A bear stands his ground always, and as long as the stars shine we stand for the cause.' "

William Todd's first account published in June 1872 (one appeared in January 1878) was: *"At a company meeting it was determined that we should raise a flag; and it should be a bear en passant, with one star. One of the ladies at the garrison gave us a piece of brown domestic and Mrs. Capt. John Sears gave us some stripes of red flannel about four inches wide. The domestic was new, but the flannel was said to have been part of a petticoat worn by Mrs. Sears across the mountains. . . . I took a pen and with ink drew the outlines of the bear and star upon the white cloth. Linseed oil and Venetian were found in the garrison and I painted the bear and star. . . . Underneath the bear and star were printed with a pen the words "California Republic" in Roman letters. In painting the words I first lined out the letters with a pen, leaving out the letter 'i' and putting 'c' where 'i' should have been, and afterward the 'i' over the 'c'. It was made with ink and as we had nothing to remove the marks of the false letters it now remains so on the flag."*

John Bidwell reported that the grizzly was so crudely painted that native Californians, passing along and looking up curiously to the flag at the top of the 70-foot staff were heard to say derisively, "Coche!" John McGroarty comments, *"The flag is no more and the Republic which it represented has also passed into history. . . It existed for only a handful of days and at the will of only a handful of men, yet while it lasted it was as real a republic as any that ever existed."*

With the destruction of the original Bear Flag in the San Francisco fire of 1906, the state lost one of its most interesting historic relics.

D.T.



CELEBRATION

To the account of dilemmas, revolts and flags, and conquest in 1846, can be added a joyful note. After Sloat's proclamation was read, forces landed, and the U.S. flag hoisted, over 100 Marines paraded Monterey with their band. Laura Bride Powers says the "Americans were frenzied with joy to behold the flag of their nation aloft on the western edge of the continent." Troops marched up Calle Principal (Main Street) to Larkin's house and serenaded the Consul (Mrs. Larkin and children were in Honolulu for safety). "The gay music of the band — *Yankee Doodle* one of the selections — greatly annoyed the solemn senoras" who "hurriedly closed the shutters", but the young senoritas "promptly re-opened them and waved to the debonair Yankees."

Perhaps the day closed with dinner on the flagship. There is evidence that the ailing 65-year old Sloat, soon to assign his command to Stockton, at least celebrated with a Grand March in the old Mexican Cuartel Building that memorable day. In association files is a picture of Mrs. Estolatica Rodrigues Dye and a notation that she led that Grand March with the Commodore.

LAURA BRIDE POWERS

Monterey History and Art Association Founder

The most prestigious award given by the Monterey History and Art Association each year is the Laura Bride Powers award, named after the founder of the Association.

It was in the depths of the big depression that she came to Monterey, already a noted historian and one-woman vigilante committee for the preservation of adobes

She came to Monterey as the first duly appointed curator of the First Theater in California. She continued in that capacity and as curator of the Old Custom House Museum until her departure in 1937.

In 1930 she organized a committee of those interested in beautification and preservation and called the first meeting for Nov. 18 at Cadematori's restaurant. The restaurant, a landmark in itself, flourished for many years in the Casa Serrano, a historic adobe which was destined far in the future to become the headquarters of the Monterey History and Art Association.

But the night of Nov. 18 it was still a restaurant, and the Association was just aborning. The dinner meeting of artists, and history enthusiasts was called to order by Carmel Martin, prominent attorney, former mayor and city planner.

Articles of incorporation for the new organization were signed by 15 people of considerable vision. They were read at the first official meeting of the Association on Jan. 19, 1931. And Col. Roger S. Fitch, commandant of the Presidio of Monterey was elected the first president.

Mrs. Powers continued to serve on the board of directors of the Association until her death in 1947.

Born at Virginia City, Nevada, Mrs Powers was reared and educated in San Francisco. She published her first book on the California missions in 1893.

In 1902 she organized the California Historic Landmarks League which played an important part in the acquisition of Sonoma Mission and Fort Ross. She also devoted much of her time to preservation of Mission San Antonio de Padua at Jolon.

She served on the staff of the San Francisco Morning Call from 1902 to 1906 as art, club and social editor. She was also a feature writer for the Oakland Tribune from 1913 to 1925.

She was active in the Women's Suffrage League. And was a member of the California Historical Society from its organization in 1922.

Her last book, "Old Monterey: California Adobe Capital", was published in 1934 and is still regarded as a valuable reference work.

In 1975 her papers, including extensive correspondence with California political figures and historians, annotated publications on California history, photographs and newspaper clippings, were presented to the California Historical Society Library manuscript collection. The valued collection was the gift of Mrs. Powers' daughter, Mrs. George Adrian Applegarth, of San Francisco. The papers include correspondence between Mrs. Powers and Joseph R. Knowland, publisher of the Oakland Tribune and member of the state parks commission, conservationist and political leader. Dr. Herbert Eugene Bolton, the historian, was also a correspondent, as was Col. Roger S. Fitch, commandant of the Presidio of Monterey and first president of the Monterey History and Art Association.

After her arrival in Monterey, Mrs. Powers roused the local citizenry by debunking several treasured local legends including that of the Sherman Rose. Her article in the Monterey Peninsula Herald stated as a matter of fact that the story of the Spanish senorita who was promised by the young Lt. Tecumsa Sherman that he would return to

claim her "when the rose tree blooms again," and then broke her heart by failing to do so, marrying a social belle in the East, was a figment of a poet's imagination, as indeed it was.

But the letters to the editor columns of the newspaper were filled for weeks afterward with indignant and angry letters branding her as a spoilsport and worse. It was the simple truth, she replied, and as a historian, she had no alternative but to tell it like it was. History, she always insisted, was fascinating enough in itself without embroidering it with fiction.

And as time went on, although jolted again and again by her dashing of their legends, the local citizenry realized that her Herculean efforts on behalf of preservation of Monterey's historic past more than made up for their loss of many cherished fables.

And the Sherman Rose house, where the rose bush bloomed, which once stood on the corner of Alvarado Street and Bonifacio Alley, where the Crocker Bank now stands, was preserved nevertheless, and was transported brick by adobe brick to the Monterey Mesa where it stands to this day.

Perhaps it might be summed up best in the words of Padre Laurence Farrell, History and Art chaplain, in his invocation at the 50th anniversary celebration of the Association at the Naval Postgraduate School on Jan. 18, 1981: "Laura Bride Powers was the moving force behind the foundings of this admirable association and I am proud to say she was a good, close and loyal friend of mine. She had the heart, mind and soul of a poet but she possessed the will of a Hipolyte Bearchard.

"In her charming book 'Old Monterey', she asked the rhetorical question (of Hipolyte Beauchard), 'Pirate or Patriot?' We can ask the same question about her in a kindly way and the answer is 'both.' Fifty years ago she dragooned the leading citizens of this Peninsula into this organization which she affirmed was to safeguard the written history, the artifacts, and the remaining adobes and the artistic traditions of Old Monterey. She did this in the nick of time; she accomplished her goals and these objectives have been the purpose of the Monterey History and Art Association and the reason for its success this past half century.

"The Holy Scripture says: 'By their fruits you shall know them.' Monterey, California and the nation owes an inestimable debt of gratitude to those who manned the ramparts before it was too late."

And Laura Bride Powers led all the rest.

Ted Durein

In Memoriam:

December 1980: Rear Adm. Lucius Henry Chappell

Lt. Cmdr. Hollis B. Goddard

Fritz Wurzman

January 1981: Elmarie Dyke

Clyde Dorsey

Draper Phillips

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