

# NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

A Quarterly Bulletin of Historic Monterey Issued by  
The Monterey History and Art Association

Contents copyright 1988 by Monterey History and Art Association

Member: National Trust for Historic Preservation  
California Historical Society • Conference of California Historical Societies  
American Association of Museums

Vol. XXIX, No. 4

December, 1988



## CALIFORNIA'S FIRST PAPER Semple and The Old War Press

**The shepherds went their hasty way  
And found the lonely stable-shed  
Where the Virgin Mother lay:**

It was just before Christmas, 1846, and the printer's long, deft fingers fairly flew as he set type for the holiday issue of "The Californian," the state's first newspaper.

**They told her how a glorious light,  
Streaming from a heavenly throng,  
Around them shone suspending night!**

He paused here, a frown crossing his face. His fingers reached in vain for the next piece of type, a capital "W". He looked down and found the errant letter in an adjacent compartment of the type case. He began the next line

**While, sweeter than a mother's song,  
Blest Angels heralded the Savior's birth,  
Glory to God on high! and peace on Earth.**

Finishing the poem, the compositor began a news dispatch. Once again, his fingers — then his eyes — sought another capital "W". There were none. With a sigh he grabbed two "V's" and continued . . .

**VVe have no fresh intelligence from Com. Stockton . . .**

The printer stood hunched over the composing stone, but it was not the nature of the work alone that caused him to slouch. Robert B. Semple stood six-feet, eight-inches tall in his stocking feet and his "newspaper office," on the second floor of the former Mexican barracks, would scarcely permit him much vertical leeway. In the other corner of the room stood an old Ramage newspaper press. Despite its evident age, Semple must have regarded the machinery affectionately from time to time. It has been said that history often springs from chance encounters and the presence of both Semple and the press in Monterey at this particular time seems proof of it. Semple could not have known it at the time, both he and the press had — and were to have — much in common.

Both came from "the East" before being introduced to each other in Monterey; both had seen their share of bad times; both were to have further successes and failures and both were to disappear rather ingloriously from the California scene.

Semple's antecedents are the easiest to trace. He was born February 3, 1806, near Mount Radiance, Cumberland County, Kentucky. His father, a doctor, served several terms in the state legislature. As a young man, Robert went to work in the office of the "Western Argus," a newspaper in Frankfort, Kentucky, where he learned the printer's trade. Not content with a single career, he also studied dentistry, law and medicine. There is no evidence he received a degree in any of these fields, but he delighted in being referred to as "Dr." Semple. His adventurous nature drove him to travel through almost every state west of the Mississippi, supporting himself by pulling teeth and digging for news. On one occasion he visited Cuba.

Semple's height always made him the object of attention. In "Sketches of Early Settlers," Mrs. Franklin H. Day tells one anecdote.



He was in a . . . meeting once, when the excitement ran high, and everybody (as they will do) jumped up on the benches; the preacher ordered them to get off the benches, as they all did . . . but ONE man. (The preacher) said again 'the gentleman will please get down off the benches;' and still this ONE man would not 'get down.' At length, he got vexed and exclaimed, pointing to (Semple) 'THAT GENTLEMAN will please get down off the bench.' Everyone in the house was looking at (Semple), who had to do something in self-defense, so he stepped upon the bench and walked the whole length of it to the isle (sic), and out of the door.

Semple's wanderings failed to calm his restlessness. He married once, but his wife died not long afterwards, leaving him alone with a son. In 1845, at the age of 39, he ran into one Lansford W. Hastings in Independence, Missouri. Hastings was organizing a group to go to California and convinced Semple that there were great opportunities waiting on the Pacific Coast. After a rugged crossing of the Sierra, the Hastings party of ten men followed the Bear River down to the edge of the Sacramento Valley. It was a rough trip and the condition of the men and their clothing showed it.

One sartorial report describes Semple arriving from the journey with his buckskins coming "just below the knee . . . fastened around his moccasins with a strip of the same material. He wore a wildcat-skin cap and the "tout ensemble" bordered on the comical".

His mount was no less remarkable. Another observer wrote that the wandering dentist-journalist arrived in the Golden State with "his spurs strapped about the calves of his legs, the smallness of the mule he was riding and the length of his limbs admitting of no other arrangement."

Semple and Hastings stopped at the first farm they encountered, owned by a man named Johnson, and offered to help him with his crops. One day Johnson, who was scarcely five feet high, took the two newcomers over to meet Captain John Sutter. On seeing Johnson and Semple approach side-by-side, Sutter was supposed to have remarked "By Jupiter, there vass a man so tall if he spread his legs apart, Johnson run right troo him."

Semple stayed in the Sacramento area, occasionally working for Sutter. Once he was sent on a scouting expedition to find a good site for a sawmill. He recommended a spot near Coloma, but was not present later when construction actually began and several glittering nuggets were found in the millrace.

By 1846, the trickle of Americans into California had become a small, but steady stream, causing local authorities some anxiety. The immigrants were a wildly diverse lot, exhibiting a wide range of political persuasions, religious convictions and moral standards. The Americans, for their part, became increasingly suspicious of the local authorities. Rumors circulated almost daily that the government was about to confiscate all foreign property or drive the Americans from the country. One of the most far-fetched stories was a supposedly reliable report that all land between San Francisco and Los Angeles was to be given to an Irish priest (said to be an agent of Great Britain) and then turned over to Catholic settlers. Fired by such tales, and emboldened by the small military garrisons in the country, in 1846 a small group of Americans decided to establish their own government. Semple was among

them.

Since his arrival in California, he had achieved a certain prominence among his countrymen. Not only was he looked up to because of his imposing stature, but he was also listened to, for — like many tall, thin men — he had a deep and commanding voice.

It was on a quiet Sunday morning, June 14, 1846, that some 30 men, joined by volunteers from the Napa Valley, descended on the town of Sonoma and “captured” General Mariano G. Vallejo. It was not much of a contest. Vallejo was rudely roused from his bed, but like a good host, he soon recovered his civilized manners and offered the Americans access to his bar. After considerable discussion, and much brandy, Vallejo signed articles of capitulation, drawn up, in part, by Semple. A crudely sewn flag, picturing a grizzly bear, was then raised in the town plaza. Having won such an easy victory, the new government leaders milled around, debating what they should do next. Several suggested looting the town, but were dissuaded when Semple gave an impassioned speech, urging them to respect private property and the lives of the inhabitants. Vallejo was much taken by the tall American’s courage, as well as his words, and was able to show his gratitude a number of years later. Soon after the “liberation” of Sonoma, word came that war had been officially declared between the United States and Mexico and that Commodore John D. Sloat had captured the port of Monterey. Semple and some of his comrades joined a ragtag band of volunteers, called the California Battalion, raised by Captain John Charles Fremont. Fremont led his men south in an attempt to join battle with the forces led by General Jose Castro. Near San Juan Bautista, they encountered a squad of Captain Daingerfield Fauntleroy’s Dragoons, sent out from Monterey to reconnoiter the area. Perhaps tiring of the rigors of campaigning, Semple and several others joined the dragoons and returned with them to their base. American occupation authorities were pleased to see additional fighting men, but appalled by their appearance. Commodore Robert F. Stockton ordered Captain Phelps of the trading vessel “Moscow” to furnish the new recruits with whatever outfits he had on board. Phelps complied as best he could but was stymied when it came to Semple. He described him later as that “lank Kentucky-looking chap,” dressed in skins with “his head surmounted by a coonskin cap, tail (hanging) in front.”

“A pair of trousers could not be found in the ship that would reach below his knees,” Phelps later wrote, “while his feet covered too much ground to place in any pair of shoes that I ever saw.”

Thus, Semple, the journalist-dentist-explorer-orator-soldier took up residence in Monterey.

The press was already there, waiting for him.

Some 12 years before, Agustin V. Zamorano, former secretary to Governor Echeandia, convinced himself that the port of Monterey needed a printing press. Accordingly, in 1832 he ordered a used Ramage press from a firm in Boston, later described as “a weather-beaten old relic even then, purchased no doubt from some fourth-rate New England printing office — an ancient relic . . . fashioned on the old plan with great wooden uprights, large enough to sustain a building; its stone bed surmounted by a massive iron screw.”

The type was no better than the press, being battered and broken over the



years. According to an invoice — now in the library of Harvard University — the entire order read “1 case, Printing press, type and apparatus, complete.” The total bill came to \$460, including passage around Cape Horn. It was delivered to the proud new businessman in the summer of 1834. Zamorano was now ready for business. After some time, a flyer emerged from his shop and was circulated throughout Monterey.

Below is a copy of the notice:

#### AVISO AL PUBLICO.

---

En la imprenta del Ciudadano Agustin V. Zamorano y Compañía establecida en esta Capital, se ofrece servir al público con la mayor puntualidad y esmero, admitiendo toda suerte de escritos, bajo las reglas establecidas por las leyes de libertad de imprenta, sujetándose los impresos sueltos al siguiente ARANCEL y conviniendo a precios mas equitativos con los Sres. que querrán establecer algun periódico.

#### ARANCEL PARA LAS IMPRESIONES.

---

Los billetes para dardías: por la planta y hasta cien ejemplares, pagaran 3 pesos.

Las papeletas de convite y otras semejantes: por la planta y hasta cien ejemplares pagaran 5 pesos.

El octavo de pliego: por la planta y hasta cien ejemplares pagará 7 pesos.

El cuarto de pliego: por la planta y hasta cien ejemplares pagará 8 pesos.

El medio pliego: por la planta y hasta cien ejemplares pagará 10 pesos.

El pliego: por la planta y hasta cien ejemplares pagará 20 pesos.

La impresion de mas de cien ejemplares de las clases espresadas pagará á razon de 1 peso 4 reales 6 granos el ciento.

Las impresiones que se hagan por cuenta del Gobierno del Territorio, se tomaran en consideracion para la equidad en los precios.

El papel se pagara por separado segun su justo valor, ó lo daran á su gusto los Sres. que querrán les imprima sus escritos.

El caracter de letra de que se hará uso es igual al que ha servido para este impreso.

MONTERREY 1834.

IMPRENTA DE ZAMORANO Y C<sup>o</sup>.

Literally translated, it read:

#### NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC

At the Printing Office of the citizen Agustin V. Zamorano & Company, established in this Capital, service is offered to the public with the greatest punctuality and care, receiving all sorts of writings under the rules established by the laws for the liberty of the press, subjecting the loose impressions to the following rates, and agreeing at more equitable prices with gentlemen who may wish to establish any periodical.

Apparently few local residents took advantage of this unique opportunity. A copy of one printed proclamation by Governor Mariano Chico was found, however, and the translation appears in Edward C. Kemble's "A History of California Newspapers." \*

**The Citizen Colonel, Mariano Chico, etc., etc., to the Inhabitants of Upper California:**

"Californians! Dire is the notice I have to give you — such as will fill you with vengeful consternation.

"Our exalted President, the conqueror of Tampico, the illustrious General Santa Ana, was taken prisoner by the insolent colonists in the Department of Texas, the 21st of April last. His fiery valor leading him to confide in fortune, carried him some distance in front of the army; that instant deity for this once abandoned him, and our country mourns the capture.

"The burning ardor of the veterans rose to its height, and they flew upon the robbers of their chief to snatch from them their prize and restore the nation to its new Ulysses; they will have already reached that pitch of glory, because who could resist the valor and might of Mexicans offended by a horde of mercenary adventurers! The nation, aghast at once, arose to rush in pursuit of the noble prisoner; when the sad disaster left the gate of the Capital the Congress and the Government displayed their powerful energies and placed in activity the immense resources of power and law, and, without doubt, the loss has been, ere this, repaired.

"The chastisement of a crime so execrable must have been exemplary; the black blood of the disgraced colony ought already to have washed out the injurious stains which momentarily chanced to fall on the reputation of the free Mexican.

"I desire at this moment to hasten, not with my companion in arms, to liberate the chief so dear to the republic, for they will already have returned him to their bosom and are paying him the homage of unbounded gratitude; but to hasten to manifest to my compatriots that to this remote country reach the emotions and feelings which that enthusiasm draws from all parts the nation's citizens to avenge her insults.

"I shall tell the world that Californians, beyond example patriotic and jealous of the national honor, are ready to swim the seas which separate them from their brothers, to join them if it were necessary to prolong the war until they have destroyed the last life of the insolent insulters of our dear country.

"Yes Californians. Thus I hear you offer, and with your oath write that of your fellow-citizen.

**MARIANO CHICO.**

Perhaps exhausted by the force of this bombast, the press retired for awhile, following Zamorano's return to Mexico. It was next reported in Sonoma, where it was employed printing a few official documents and then again returned to Monterey, finally being put in storage to rust away.

The third force in the establishment of the first paper in California was Walter Colton, chaplain of the frigate "Congress." Colton, later named Alcalde of Monterey, was a man of many accomplishments and had a great love of letters. There is no record of whether Colton found Semple, or vice-versa, or whether together or separately they discovered the existence of a printing press in town. In any case, it could not have been long before August 15, when Semple wrote Captain Fauntleroy, asking for his discharge. He had



been with the company exactly 30 days. Apparently there was no dictionary at hand. The letter read:

Monterey Aug 1846

Dear Sir

On my arrival here I found everything in a state of quiet, no news from the enemy and but little apprehension on the part of the officers here of any attack from them, but they are expecting information from the south daily. Mr. Price will hand you this and tell you all the news.

On examination I found a very good press and a sufficient quantity of type to print a paper, the size of this sheet [12½ by 8½ inches]. Capt. Mervin[e] offered me the use of them and his warm support in the publication of a paper. Parson Colton who is practiced in the chair Editorial is highly pleased and offers his talents and the warm support and approbation of the Comodore. Mr. Miner . . . offered me the upper room in the North end of the upper Barracks for an office to which I have removed all the printing materials. I have also got 40 reams of paper which will answer for a commencement and I am in hopes that in a short time we shall be able to enlarge the sheet. I should have gone out tomorrow according to promise but the Capt. thought it unnecessary and advised me to write to you requesting a discharge. I regret exceedingly to ask for it, but as my object in leaving home, was to act where I cant [sic] be of the most service to my adopted country and being the only person here who understand the management of a newspaper. I feel it my duty to do so,

My opinion is corroborated by all the officers on the station, that a well conducted paper at this time would do more to conciliate the Natives and unite the foreigners residing in California than any other step which can be taken, and would have a powerful tendency to get things right at home. It will be the medium through which the movements of the energetic officers on this station will reach the people, not only of this country but our friends at home. It will set forth the immense resources of this country, and its commercial importance and will have a powerful influence in settling this country with an enlightened population.

With this view of the matter I feel that my duty impels me to ask for my discharge but permit me to assure you, that it is with feelings of regret, that I leave the company with which I have been so kindly and amicable associated. Should you differ from me in opinion, notify me by the first opportunity and you will find me at my post.

With my kinest feelings for your officers and the company I remain With great Respect

Your Obt Servant  
R. Semple

Colton was not quite so taken with their printing machinery. Later in his delightful book, "Three Years in California," he recalled:

"The press was old enough to be preserved as a curiosity; the mice had burrowed in the "balls;" there were no rules, no leads, and the types were rusty and all in pi; it was only by scouring that the letters could be made to show their faces; a sheet or two of tin was procured, and these, with a jack knife, were cut into rules and leads. Luckily, we found with the press the greater part of a keg of ink; and now came the great scratch for paper. None could be found except what is used to envelop the tobacco smoked by the natives. A coaster had a small supply of this on board, which we procured."

In spite of the problems the publishers faced, somehow the old press was oiled up, battered type set in somewhat parallel lines, and the ink applied to the form. On August 15, 1846, scarcely five weeks after the capture of Monterey, the production of the "Californian" the state's first newspaper began. It boldly proclaimed that it was published by Colton & Semple. The subscription rate was five dollars a year. Beginning in the top left column was the paper's "Prospectus:

### PROSPECTUS

This is the first paper ever published in California, and though issued upon a small sheet, is intended it shall contain matter that will be read with interest. The principles which will govern us in conducting it, can be set forth in a few words.

we shall maintain an entire and utter severance of all political connexion with Mexico. we renounce at once and forever all fealty to her laws, all obedience to her mandates.

we shall advocate an oblivion of all past political offences, and allow every man the privilege of entering this new era of events unembarrassed by any part he may have taken in previous revolutions.

We shall maintain freedom of speech and the press, and those great principles of religious toleration, which allows every man to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience.

We shall advocate such a system of public instruction as will bring the means of a good practical education to every child in California.

We shall urge the immediate establishment of a well organized government, and a universal obedience to its laws.

we shall encourage immigration, and take special pains to point out to agricultural immigrants those sections of unoccupied lands, where the fertility of the soil will most amply repay the labors of the husbandman.

we shall encourage domestic manufactures and the mechanic arts as sources of private wealth, individual comfort, and indispensable to the public prosperity.

we shall urge the organization of interior defences sufficient to protect the property of citizens from the depredations of the wild indians.

we shall advocate a territorial relation of California to the United States, til the number of her inhabitants is such that she can be admitted a member of that glorious confederacy.

we shall support the present measures of the commander in chief of the [sic] American squadron on our coast, so far as they conduce to the public tranquility, the organization of a free representative government and our alliance with the United States.

we shall advocate the lowest rate of duties on foreign imports, and favor an exemption of the necessaries of life, even from these duties.

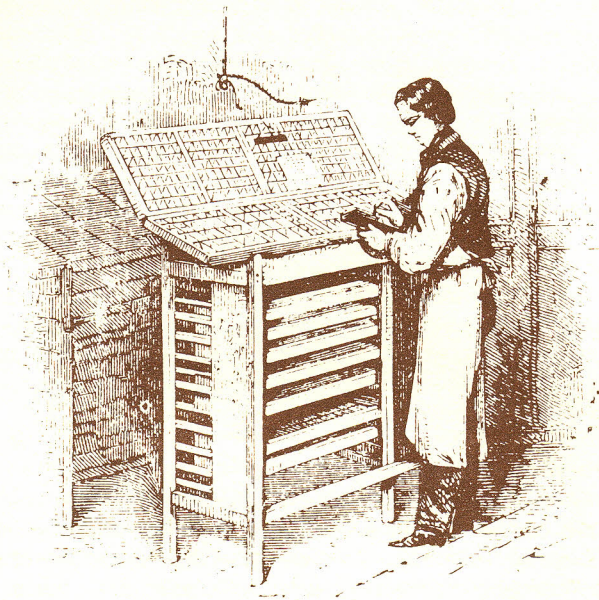
We shall go for "California — for all her interests, social, civil and religious" — encouraging every thing that promotes these, resisting every thing that can do them harm.

This press shall be free and independent; unawed by power and untrammelled by party. The use of its columns shall be denied to none, who have suggestions to make, promotive of the public weal.

we shall lay before our readers the freshest domestic intelligence and the earliest [sic] foreign news.

we commence our publication upon a verry [sic] small sheet, but its dimensions [sic] shall be enlarged as soon as the requisite materials [sic] can be obtained.





This introduction “might readily be taken for a declaration of independence on the part of the old press and type,” Edward C. Kemble later wrote.

Following the prospectus is an example of the “freshest domestic intelligence and . . . earlist foreign news.” It is a copy of the Declaration of War between the United States and Mexico. This probably came as no great surprise to the residents of Monterey who had been occupied by American troops for well over a month. The first editorial suggestion of the paper is to urge the establishment of a mail service in the state. This seemed a sound suggestion, but it may be noted that at this time Semple was trying to gain an exclusive franchise for such a venture. The first issue also carried a few extracts from old copies of Eastern newspapers and some Mexican-American war news. Articles were written in both English and Spanish. If the publishers planned to support their venture with advertising, they were off to a slow start. The first issue contained only one ad, offering translation services. There was a legal notice, however. It prohibited the sale of liquor and spelled out the penalties for public drunkenness.

In this, and the succeeding issues of the paper, there was one peculiarity that immediately jumped out at the reader. Colton was not bashful about pointing it out.

**OUR ALPHABET** — Our type is a (S)panish font, picked up here in a cloister, and has no W's in it, as there is none in the (s)panish alphabet. I have sent to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) for the letter, in the meantime we must use two VV's. Our paper at present is that used for wrapping cigars; in due time we will have something better, our object is to establishe [sic] a press in California, and this we shall in all probability be able to accomplish.

Other typographical and spelling aberrations were noted by Kemble:

Sometimes the letter "V" ran out in setting up the paper. In the emergency thus occasioned, "W" would be spelled with two "U's." "The Neuu Ministry" is the heading of an article. A very destructive gale had visited "Key UUEst." In his notices to correspondents the editor informs "VVandering VVillie" that he is declined. In one of his numbers the editor appears to have given offense to some one. What, then, did he do? Did he refuse to retract, or oblige the offended party to wait a whole week . . . He did neither; but, on being shown that he must recede, went straight to the office, ordered the press to be stopped, and in the remainder of the edition which had not been worked appeared the following substituted article which we copy "verbatim et literatim:"

"In my anxiety for information in relation to tovvn lots, I vvas induced to publish in the first papers printed, of the present number, a small article vvch seems to convey a different idea from vvhat vvas intended. And as an Editor I am determined never to make remarks vvch bear upon the personal feelings of any. I have therefore substituted this article.

"R. SEMPLE."

Proper names were often mangled in the "Californian":

The Monterey editors appear to have not alone suffered from want of information on topics discussed, and a perverted use of the alphabet in spelling out their meaning, but, also, from want of knowledge of the construction of Spanish proper names. We read of the Toolarey valley, of Napper valley, and of Yerbabuno, meaning Yerba Buena, the present site of San Francisco.

The paper continued on through the Christmas season and into the new year of 1847. There is no record of how Colton and Semple divided the various duties that were required in producing a newspaper. It is generally supposed that Colton did the bulk of the writing, however. In April, nine months after the paper's inception, Colton's name was dropped from the masthead. With a practiced eye, Kemble gauges the failing state of the paper's health and the consequences:

The advertising patronage of the paper had been very inconsiderable thus far, though the rates had been fixed at "New York prices." We count only seven advertisements, besides the official proclamation and notices, in the number of April 24th. The largest and most conspicuous of them is for the new city of Francisca (afterwards Benicia), of which the editor is part proprietor. J.F. Romie advertises excellent fresh water from his well, "which he offers to the inhabitants of Monterey at the rate of two reals per week for each family." T.H. Green (whose exposure under his real name, Paul Geddes, afterwards in San Francisco created so much sensation) advertises dry goods, groceries and hardware.

Jas. Watson "keeps constantly on hand a large assortment of merchandise." Crane has opened a restaurant. Milton Little (still remaining, perhaps now the oldest merchant in Monterey) has just received a stock of goods "from the Islands." These are the principal business advertisements. They must have contributed to pay but a very small proportion of the editor's expenses. but some months before this, it is evident, Semple had made up his mind that he was in the wrong locality for business. On the 6th of May, the "Californian" appears for the last time in Monterey. There is no notice given of the intended change, and after it was made there was some complaint on the part of a few of the townspeo-



ple, that their long editor had walked off with a press and type not belonging to him, but a part of the public property at Monterey. These charges may have had no foundation, and in any event Semple was probably as much entitled to the material as the town; but he appears not to have stood long upon the order of his going after resolving to take his departure. His office was put on board a sailing vessel, his printer going with it. When the venerable old mill, with its square, heavy uprights and cross beams was again erected and the impression adjusted, it announced that the publication of the "Californian" would henceforth be continued at San Francisco.

Semple did not linger long in San Francisco. While still working on the paper in Monterey, he had paid a visit to his old friend Vallejo. As the two of them were riding along the Sacramento River, near Carquinez Straits, Semple pointed to a spot on the North Shore, remarking that it would make a good spot for a port. Vallejo just happened to own the property and remembering Semple's kindness to him and the citizens of Sonoma, agreed to sell the American several square miles of waterfront. The proposed town was first called Francisca, after the first name of Vallejo's wife, but later changed to Benicia, her second name, to avoid confusion with the up and coming San Francisco.

Semple returned to Monterey and interested the wealthy merchant Thomas O. Larkin in helping finance the project. Thereafter he was gone from Monterey much of the time, probably to the consternation of Colton.

Semple was already aware that he had a rival when he arrived in San Francisco. Sam Brannan, a Mormon, had started a paper, "The California Star," the previous January.

Upon seeing the first copy of the new paper, Semple remarked that it was "a small but very neat sheet . . . published and owned by S. Brannan, the leader of the Mormons."

The editorial staff of "The Star" was not so kind.

"We have received two late numbers of the "Californian," one story read, "a dirty little paper printed at Monterey, on worn out material of one of the California war presses. It is published by Walter Colton and Robert Semple, one a lying sycophant and the other an overgrown lickspittle."

Semple found he could not divide his energies between the newspaper and his land development, so after several months in San Francisco, he sold the "Californian". Here, he and the press parted company, but both were to make further indelible impressions on California history.

Semple took up residence in Benicia, remarried, and established a lucrative ferry business across the Sacramento. He probably soon tired of local wags questioning whether he needed a boat at all "since he was so tall he could probably cross the river without help." In 1849, he was elected a delegate to the state convention, empowered to draw up a constitution for California.

Upon his arrival in Monterey, he was elected to preside over the proceedings and did so until the new document became law. While Semple was busy promoting Benicia, newspapering in San Francisco fell on hard times. The lure of gold had just about emptied the fledgling city. The "Californian" was sold several times and then finally merged with the "Star". This made the old press superfluous, but it was soon purchased, and followed the goldseekers to the



ROBERT SEMPLE

*Courtesy of the Huntington Library and Art Gallery.*

foot of the Sierra, where, in April, 1849, it produced the first issue of the "Placer Herald" in Sacramento. The "Herald" had Sacramento all to itself for about a year and then was challenged by a new publication which was issued three times a week. The "Herald" retaliated by going daily, which far exceeded the old Ramage's creaky capabilities. It was shipped back to San Francisco and put in storage as a relic. But not for long. Once again it was purchased and this time shipped to the booming city of Stockton, where it had a year's employment putting out the "Stockton Times and Tuolumne City Intelligencer." When a fire destroyed the paper's plant, the press was purchased by Dr. Lewis Gunn and Enos L. Christman, who hauled it across the foothills to Sonora for the production of the "Sonora Herald."

As the town grew, it once more became obsolete, and was taken on its final journey to Columbia, the property of one G.W. Gore. Gore published the "Columbia Star" for several months, but angry creditors forced a halt to the operation. The press suffered the indignity of being auctioned off, and was hauled from the newspaper shop to the sidewalk while a stout cart was sought to haul it away. What happened next is told in the rich and indignant prose of Kemble in the best 1858 style:

**"That night [November 13, 1851] the press was removed into the middle of the street and an act of vandal ruffianism committed which will always be a reproach**



to the town of Columbia. Either led or instigated by Gore, his companions and sympathizers kindled a fire under the aged relic and destroyed in a few moments what, even in barbarian countries, would have been held in veneration a life time, if only as an unmeaning curiosity. A greater outrage never desecrated the name of an American town, or disgraced American citizenship, and the only possible palliation that can be suggested is the very meagre one that the incendiaries may not have known the age and historical value of the old press. There were those in Columbia who evidently attached an archaeological interest to the first issue of the press in that town, for we read that an ounce was paid for the first copy of the "Star" that was printed. What a misfortune that these could not have interposed to prevent the destroying of a relic whose history would have been more curious than that of any similar article, perhaps, now [1858] in existence. As an heirloom of the art [of printing] on these shores, its value would have been almost priceless . . . As for the "Columbia Star," it only blinked twice, and was then lost in the glare of the heathenish conflagration it had kindled."

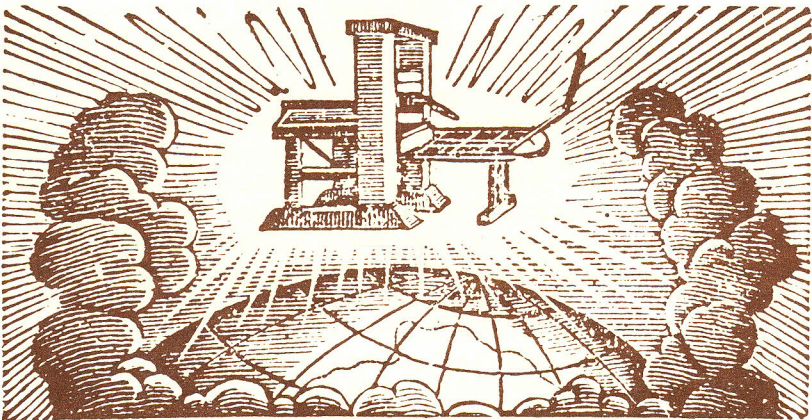
In spite of Semple's distinguished role in Monterey, he found that his partner, Larkin, wanted to desert the Benicia enterprise. Discouraged by this turn of events, Semple bought a considerable tract of property near Colusa and took up ranching. It was there in 1854 — three years after the destruction of the press — that he died of injuries suffered after falling off a horse. He was 48 years old.

Elisha Crosby, a fellow convention delegate, later wrote of Semple:

"He was very tall and straight . . . with broad hands that closed like a vice upon the hand of a friend, a great high head, full of brains and practical sense . . . He was a good judge of Bourbon and honest as he was tall."

The press also received a eulogy. Christman, who no doubt spent many a hot day and night in Sonora struggling to put out his paper, had this to say about pioneer newspapering in general, and the old war press, in particular:

"I have known of printing offices in log cabins with the latchstring always hanging out, but here, I am seated at a table covered with papers in the middle of a "rag house," ten by fourteen feet, surrounded by all the paraphernalia of a printing establishment. When I speak of printing materials, I do not mean that we



have such an assortment of things as we had in the Record office [at home in Pennsylvania]. On the contrary, we have but two or three cases of old type, a wooden "stick" manufactured by my own hands with a jack-knife, and an old Ramage press that has long been a pioneer in the business, the first numbers of nearly all the papers printed in California having been printed upon it after it had been brought second-hand from the States through Mexico . . . It well deserves the title of the "Pioneer Press." It has spoken to millions and no one can calculate the amount of good it has already done, nor estimate what amount it is yet capable of doing. It has already crossed the continent in its mission of good from the Atlantic shores to those of the Pacific, and is now on its way back. I doubt not but it will next be heard from on the summit of the Sierra Nevada range, and hope it will continue in its course until it is met on the broad plains by something from the East.

### FOOTNOTE

\*Edward C. Kemble is extensively quoted in this article for a number of good reasons. Kemble was so much a part of early California journalism that he almost wandered into the main body of the story. He came west in 1847 with the Brannan party, one of whose goals was to establish a paper in San Francisco. Although he was only 18 years old, he already had a goodly supply of "ink in his veins." His father had been editor of the Troy, New York, "Budget," and before Kemble arrived on the West Coast he had worked as a printer in New York City. Though the majority of the Brannan party was Mormon, the young printer was hired for his skills and not his religious preferences. He helped launch the "Star" and then moved with the old Ramage press (one of the subjects of our story) to Sacramento, acting as compositor, printer, publisher, editor and manager of the "Placer Times." After a few months he returned to San Francisco and helped edit the "Star and Californian," a merger of Semple's and Brannan's papers. In 1858, just 12 years after the state's first paper was produced in Monterey, Kemble wrote "A History of California Newspapers," which ran as a supplement to the "Sacramento Union" on December 25, 1958. It is a particularly valuable reference work, as Kemble knew many early pioneer printers and journalists. His history was re-published by The Talisman Press, Los Gatos, California, in 1962 with a forward by Helen Harding Bretnor.

—DLW



## SOURCES AND REFERENCES

1. BANCROFT, H.H. - "History of California" vols. V and VI. San Francisco, California, 1884-1890.
2. COLTON, Walter - "Three Years in California," Stanford, 1949.
3. CHRISTMAN, Florence Morrow - "One Man's Gold, the Journals and Letters of a Forty-Niner," New York, 1930.
4. CROSBY, Elisha - "Reminiscences of 1849," MS, Huntington Library.
5. DAY, R.H. - "Sketches of Early Settlers of California," Hesperian, 111, November, 1859.
6. HANSEN, Woodrow J. - "Robert Semple, Pioneer, Promoter, Politician," California Historical Society Quarterly, vol. 41.
7. KEMBLE, Edward C. - "A History of California Newspapers, 1846 - 1858." Reprinted from the supplement to the Sacramento "Union" of December 25, 1858, reissued by The Talisman Press, Los Gatos, California, 1962. Edited and with a forward by Helen Harding Bretnor.
8. PHELPS, William D. - "Fore and Aft," Boston, 1871.
9. Semple, Robert B. - "Sketch of the Country," in Lansford W. Hastings, "A New History of Oregon and California," Cincinnati, 1849.
10. WHEAT, Carl I. - "The Old Monterey Press," Biobook, Oakland, California, 1848.

Noticias del Puerto de Monterey is a quarterly publication issued by the Monterey History and Art Association every March, June, September and December.

ISSN No: 0886-7151

Changes of address should be directed to the Association office: Post Office Box 805, Monterey, California 93942.

**THE EDITORS  
MONTEREY HISTORY  
AND ART ASSOCIATION  
Post Office Box 805  
Monterey, California 93942**

Non-Profit Organization Bulk Rate U. S. Postage <b>PAID</b> Permit No. 88 Monterey, California
---

**Return Requested**

## **Officers and Directors**

### **OFFICERS: 1988-1989**

President: Mr. Gordon Paul Smith  
Vice-President: Dr. Philip Nash  
Secretary: Mrs. John McCune (Jane)  
Treasurer: Mr. Frank Fulton  
Member-at-Large: Mrs. Kip Hudson

**EDITORS:**  
Virginia W. Stone

### **DIRECTORS:**

Mr. Michael Albov, Mrs. Glenn Engholm, Lorraine Faherty, Mrs. Roger Fremier, Mr. Gerald Fry, Mr. Frank Fulton, Mrs. Kip Hudson, Mrs. John McCune, Col. Richard D. McFarland, Dr. Phillip Nash, Mr. Rodolfo Nava, Miss Joan Peacock, Mrs. James Poland, Mr. James Poland, Mrs. John Robotti, Mr. Richard Rotter, Mr. John Sewald, Mr. S.A.J. Slade, Mr. Gordon Paul Smith, Virginia Woodward Stone, Dr. Charles A. Sweet, Jr., Mr. Kenneth Walker.

### **HONORARY LIFETIME DIRECTORS:**

Mrs. C. Tod Singleton, Mr. Ted Durein, Rear Admiral Earl E. Stone and Mrs. Amelie Elkinton.