

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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Captain Paty's trading ship, the Don Quixote, was well known up and down the California coast in the 1840s. Illustration from a painting by Duncan Gleason, reproduced in his book, "The Islands and Ports of California," The Devin-Adair Company, New York, 1958.

INSIDE: John Paty, Yankee Trader

John Paty, Yankee Trader

During the early years of the Nineteenth Century, California's principal links with the world were forged by Yankee trading ships. Beginning in the 1820's and continuing until the American occupation in 1846, these ships bought or traded hides and tallow--California's principal exports--for a variety of goods and materials from the rest of the civilized world. Richard Henry Dana gives a classic account of how these ships operated, putting in at small bights and bays along the rugged coast, taking aboard what became known as "California dollars." Dana's account in *Two Years Before the Mast* gives us a picture of the trade from the perspective of an ordinary seaman.

But who were the owners and operators of these venturesome vessels? Trade on the California coast grew from the visits of Yankee whaling ships, who found that the Californios were eager to purchase some of their supplies. Since these vessels were often outfitted to be at sea for several years and could replenish many of their goods, these sales turned out to be a profitable sideline. Such trade was supposed to be a monopoly of the Spanish government, based in Mexico, but little attention was apparently given to needs of Alta California, and the supply ships that did arrive carried a scanty selection of general cargo. Shrewd Yankee traders took note of this demand and soon sent ships to the West Coast for the sole purpose of trading. After Mexico wrested its independence from Spain, foreign ships were allowed to cruise the coast, after paying hefty import taxes at the Custom House in Monterey, the principal port of entry. Many of these ships came from Boston, so many in fact that Californios began to refer to any trading ship as a "Boston". The majority of these vessels belonged to large Boston firms, such as Bryant, Sturgis and Company or Appleton and Company. Others were owned by their captains, often in complicated partnerships with shoreside merchants. These arrangements sometimes covered the vessel, sometimes the goods carried by the vessel, and sometimes both ship and cargo in differing percentages. The successful owner--captain had to embody a range of diverse qualities seldom seen in today's entrepreneurs. Obviously he needed to be able to command a ship, with all the skill and knowledge that such a position demands. He had no committee to help him make decisions in times of mortal peril, where his instant judgment--and his judgment alone--could make the difference between life or death.

He also had to know how to handle men, often a mixed crew, who were forced to do wet, miserable and dangerous work, sometimes far from home for years on end and for wages of often less than ten dollars a month. In addition to make a living as a trader, he needed the intestinal fortitude of a commodities broker, and the skill and daring of a riverboat gambler.

Although many men had these qualities in varying degrees, few exemplified them as well as John Paty.

His story is a classic example of the poor boy who ran away to sea, became captain at an early age and retired as a highly successful and respected man. In addition to his logbooks, Captain Paty kept a journal, portions of which are hereby reprinted with the permission of Henry H. Haight, III, one of his descendants. It begins in the first decade of the Nineteenth Century:

I was born in the town of Plymouth on the 22nd day of February, 1807, ("so my mother tells") in a house located on the very upper end of Sandwich Street. I have no distinct recollection of anything of importance until I was about five years old. At this time my father lost his right arm by a white swelling. We were then living in a house on Sandwich Street, to the southward of the training green which was built by my grandfather (J. Paty). My father had been a sea-going man, and the loss of his arm prevented him from following his vocation. He afterwards taught a school until his death in 1814, aged 33 years, and left six children.

A singular occurrence about the time my father died took place. A large apple tree put forth a beautiful large blossom in the month of September. My sister A, who was living with my grandmother said that grandmother told her that it was a certain sign that some of the family would die with fever. My father told her to go back and ask her grandmother what kind of a fever it would be. He was then in good health (apparently) although died but one week from that date. For a long time after, we all believed that the putting forth of a blossom on a tree in the fall was ominous of some extraordinary event.

I went to school first to my father; after his death to my aunt Paty Churchill; then to the town school, to sundry masters. Out of the whole, say some ten or twelve, I do not think one in eight were the proper persons to teach children. I think the method of beating knowledge into a child's head is a hard case. I never was a bad boy in school and the punishments I received gave me a dread of a school master or a school house, consequently I would resort to any excuse rather than go to school. Of course, I did not learn fast, (and I do believe that some of the brightest intellects were kept back by the methods their teachers used in trying to instruct them).

From the time I was eight years old until I was eleven I was my own master. My mother permitted me to do almost as I pleased and what time I was not at school I was generally roving about the harbor in boats, or visiting the different manufacturing establishments about town, and I think I acquired much mechanical and scientific knowledge during the three years I was running at large.

The death of my grandfather produced a great change in my life. I was turned out into the cold world without a penny with two younger brothers and one sister younger than myself and they had but a small pittance to subsist on. My mother wished me to learn a trade which I refused on the plea that I could not assist my younger brothers and sister by learning a trade, but concluded to go to sea in hopes that in a few years I should be able to assist them, which, thank God, I accomplished.

I shipped with my uncle, Ephraim, in the brig *Gov. Winslow*. I forgot

to say that I had made a passage in the Steamer *Eagle* from Plymouth to Duxbury and back in 1819 (I think).

We proceeded to Boston with the brig *Gov. Winslow*, and, after waiting there a month or so, took a freight for Amsterdam, from thence we proceeded to St. Ubes, and from there to Plymouth, where we arrived (I think) in September 1821. This was a sorry hard voyage for me. I was very seasick during the whole passage across the Atlantic and our brig was deeply laden and had a very leaky forecastle, and during almost the whole passage, my bed, pillow and blankets were saturated with salt water and I do not think I ate three pounds of provisions for the first fifteen days. My weight was reduced to 65 lbs. I blamed my uncle much, at the time, for what I considered cruel treatment toward me, although I think boys were treated about in the like manner by most of the ship masters in those days.

I got near over seasickness, my spirits returned and I increased in weight to 110 lbs. before our arrival home.

I never shall forget my sensations on my first arrival, only after an absence (sic) of six months. It seemed as though I had got into a world of angels with their smiling faces. I felt quite happy until my funds began to get low, when I found it necessary to do something, and, not knowing any other way to get money but by going to sea.

Paty may have felt he had served his apprenticeship, but further hard times lay ahead. In February, 1822, he shipped out on the schooner *Banker*, belonging to a neighbor, Lemuel Stevens. As he tells the story:

The Schn. was in Boston, and, as our harbor was frozen over, I had to proceed to Boston by land. My stage fare would be \$2 and this I didn't feel like paying as my wages was (sic) only \$5 or \$6 per month. The mate and one person besides myself had engaged to go in the Schn. and we were all in Plymouth. Finally, we came to the determination to walk to Boston and send our baggage by the stage. We started in the morning very early and walked about ten miles when it began to snow. Soon after the mate proposed returning home again, the other man agreed with him, and I proposed to keep on as we had got one-half the distance and there didn't appear as though we should have a violent storm and for one-half dollar we could get a supper and lodging at almost any house. The mate got quite vexed at my suggestion and told me to go along if I liked but he should return. I believe he was always prejudiced against me afterwards as he was laughed at by the owner for returning. I do believe that I should have gone on if I had ever traveled that road before. As it was, I was only fifteen years old and didn't like to go alone, and a stranger to everyone on the way. Consequently, we all returned to Plymouth and early the next morning the owner, Mr. Stevens, harnessed his light wagon with two horses and drove us out about ten miles, where he left us and we proceeded on foot. The snow was about one inch deep on the ground and so very slippery that we found it very hard traveling. When about eight miles from Boston, a gentleman came up with us in a sleigh, and, perceiving that *I walked lame, invited me to get in, which I gladly accepted. The

horse ran away with him and was but a short time taking us about three miles, where he stopped at a hotel and I marched along slowly waiting for the others to come up. Finally, I sat down on a rock as I did not dare to proceed for fear I should get lost and not find the vessel. I waited about half an hour; it seemed to me like half a day. The sun had just gone down and it was severely cold. My shoes were frozen like a piece of horn and I was very lame. My limbs seemed to be almost stiff and it was with much pain and exertion that I could keep up with the others when I started again. We got on board between 7 and 8 o'clock that evening. We found the cabin locked and no person on board. The mate started off after the captain and in about half an hour returned with the keys. We got below finally and struck a light. I asked the mate if we could get our baggage that evening and he answered very roughly, "No, not to-night". I looked around the cabin and saw nothing but empty berths with the exception of the captain's. I had been very hungry during the day but ate a very little, expecting to get a good supper on board, but I found on my arrival that I could not eat anything. I was so completely exhausted. I finally turned into one of the berths on the soft side of a hard board to rest my weary limbs, without any covering except what I wore from home, and this is the month of February. Why the mate could not go to the stage office that evening I never could divine. Had I not been an entire stranger, I should have got my bed that evening. As it was, I passed a miserable night and had to go at work at daylight next morning. The thought of that night puts me in mind of the California travellers, where you take your spurs for the pillow and cover yourself with the bridle. God only knows how much I suffered during the first eighteen months after the death of my grandfather. I then thought that I would be the father of my children and there were times when I didn't feel as though I could thank my Father for my existence and it would be a pleasure now to follow either of my children to the grave rather than to have them suffer what I have suffered.

I would recommend all parents who intend to send their sons to sea to send them the first voyage in a large vessel and to be extremely careful about the character and disposition of the captain. Some men are angels at home but devils at sea, or in foreign ports. I have sailed with such men, men who would not only steal from the cargo but take articles belonging to persons who esteemed him as a friend; and these kind of men will rack their brains in trying to get the advantage of any one. They who take flour, lard, candles, etc. out of a cargo are, perhaps, taking it out of the widow and orphans' mouths and, after all is done, they will boast of their famous exploits, their great shrewdness, cunning, etc. And there were some ship masters in those days, say from 1820 to 30, who, to hear them talk when out of sight of their owners, considered themselves of more importance than King George or President Washington ever did. I detest the very name of such men and I would prefer having a son of mine brought up in the Alms House sooner than go to sea with such characters. But, thank God, they never affected the principles of honesty and truth which were instilled into my mind by my mother and good old grandfather. I must say that I never did cheat a person out of a dollar knowingly; neither did I ever tell a falsehood to injure any one.

Paty continued his career, making numerous trips up and down the East Coast, to the West Indies and several more voyages to Europe. In 1825 he was offered a mate's job and although he was apprehensive about accepting the responsibility because of his age and small size, he made his first voyage as an officer from Boston to Charleston and back. Four years later, at the age of 21, he was given command of a brig and made a successful trip to Mobile and back. That same year he "became acquainted with my beloved Mary Ann Jefferson" (later Mrs. John Paty). "She stole my heart," he wrote some years later, "and has kept it single to herself ever since."

In 1833 his brother Henry arrived from the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands, where he had established a store, and tried to get the young captain to buy a vessel and go in partnership with him.

Paty was dubious about the prospects of such a venture, however, and made a trip to New York. While he was gone, his brother purchased a vessel and finally convinced the young captain to make the voyage.

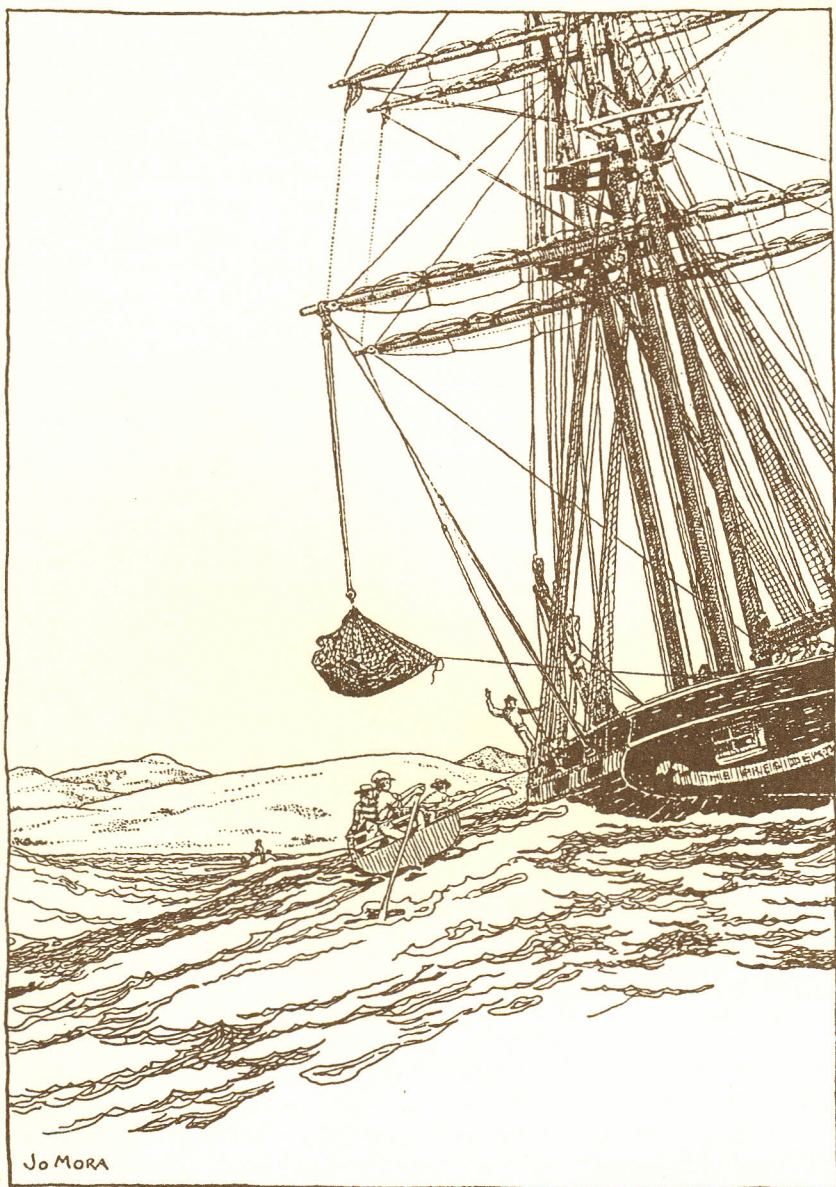
John, his wife and brothers, Henry and William, left Boston in November of 1833 on the *Avon*, which John described as "a fine little brig of 120 tons." After a difficult passage by Cape Horn, they arrived in Honolulu in May of 1834. According to writer Adele Ogden, at that time "the Hawaiian Islands were a Venice in the Pacific." "Many were the ocean furrows ploughed to and from this entreport of trade," she wrote. "Hither came ships from New England and other ships from the Orient. Yankee and Chinese goods were then stowed together in the same hold and borne to California, to the Northwest Pacific – or perhaps to Mexico or South America. Back the vessels sailed to the island mart with mixed cargoes of hides, tallow and sea-otter fur. Sometimes they were restowed with an exclusive cargo of hides and sent directly to Boston; sometimes the hides were transferred to a Boston-bound vessel."⁽¹⁾

Young John and Henry sold their interest in the *Avon*, after chartering her for a trip to California. Later, John bought a fifth interest in the bark, *Don Quixote*, a vessel he was associated with off and on for many years. He made a full trip to Boston and returned to Oahu with trade goods in 1835.

He first arrived on the California coast in May, 1837, aboard his brother's schooner, the *Clarion*. This vessel, later renamed the *California*, was sold to the Mexican government and John took some of the goods aboard to Monterey. In his journal, he writes:

During my stay in Monterey, I was treated very kindly by Mr. Larkin, Mr. Watson, Mr. Stokes and Mr. Spence, generally lodged at Mr. Larkin's house and took my meals anywhere where I could get them, as there was no public house in the place.

Paty had sold his fifth interest in the *Don Quixote* while in Boston in 1835 to raise money for cargo to be taken to Hawaii. The Hawaiian government had meanwhile acquired the vessel and in 1837 offered to sell it to the Paty brothers. John, who fancied the ship, talked Henry into buying it.



Yankee trader taking hides aboard in an offshore swell, two to four miles off the coast. Reprinted from "Californios," written and illustrated by Jo Mora, Doubleday & Co., 1949.

It is difficult today to comprehend the time and distances covered by sailing ships in the mid-Nineteenth Century. After loading the *Don Quixote* in Hawaii, John Paty took the ship to Santa Barbara, then to Monterey and San Francisco, stopping en route to pick up a load of lumber in Santa Cruz. Returning down the coast, he found "trade very bad . . . most all goods were trusted on a year's time; consequently we made more debts than we collected. "In San Pedro, they took hides and tallow in the hold and 30 horses on deck which they transported back to

Hawaii "and sold them very well." They were discouraged by finding little freight in the islands, but had a stroke of luck when a whaler ran aground and they got half of her cargo of oil to take back to the East Coast. From Hawaii they sailed to the Society Islands, touching at Tahiti, and then around the Horn, making the entire trip from Oahu to Boston in 113 days--considered very good time.

Paty had left his wife at home after the last voyage and had been gone a total of three years and eight months. He was saddened to learn that his son, born a month after he left, died at the age of two years. This time, when he left Boston, he took his wife with him again. They sailed from the East Coast to Valparaiso with freight and passengers in 97 days and from there had "a pleasant passage" to Oahu in 31 days. Paty's journal then reports:

On our arrival at Honolulu, we found that brother Henry had gone to California in the *Schn. Morse*, which Mr. H.A. Pierce and himself had bought, and as Mr. Pierce wanted a vessel, we chartered him the *Don Quixote* to proceed to California and there wait for the ship *Alcipoe* to arrive from the N.W. coast and then proceed to Mazatlan and from there to return to Oahu and from Oahu proceed to China and back to Oahu.

Tragedy struck in 1841 on a trip from Valparaiso to Hawaii. One of the crewmen apparently contracted smallpox while on shore and the disease quickly spread to the others on board. Paty writes:

My brother H. was quite unwell and finally became delirious. I was quite sick also and Mr. Southworth was slightly unwell, in fact we were nearly all sick. The second mate (Mr. Jones), cook and steward and one man was about all the well persons that were on board at one time, and at this time we had a gale of wind from the west and very dark weather and the same time surrounded with reef and low sand Islands, and only four men able to go aloft, and I was obliged to haul myself upstairs by the railing, in fact I was not able to leave my berth. This was the most trying time I ever saw at sea. Brother H. grew worse and in an unguarded moment destroyed himself. I really thought then that I should not live 24 hours, but as a gale came on that night and caught us in a dangerous situation, the safety of the still living diverted my mind in part from the thought of the dead and seemed to give me more strength, both body and mind. (A gale always stimulates me to exertion.) I had my brother sewed up in canvas and carried him to Tahiti, but was not allowed to bury him on shore.

Henry's death caused John much grief, but he continued his trading voyages up and down the Pacific Coast, sometimes in partnership with his brother, William, sometimes with other men. In late 1841, he became acquainted with William Heath Davis, an ambitious young man, who became one of the most successful merchants on the coast. Davis joined the *Don Quixote* in 1842 as supercargo, or business agent, and soon showed his natural ability as a businessman. One trading trip

was described by Theodor Cordua, who took passage on the *Don Quixote* in 1842. In his memoirs he describes the voyage:

Captain John Paty had recently arrived from the Sandwich Islands to trade his cargo of goods for skins and tallow. all harbors from San Diego to the Bay of San Francisco were visited . . . The supercargo usually travelled on horse and announced the arrival of the ship to customers and friends. In the stern of the ship, in front of the cabin staircase, the steerage was like a regular store provided with all kinds of goods. Here one could make purchases, retail and wholesale, according to one's needs. As soon as the anchor had been cast in the harbor, the prospective customers came aboard so at times a regular little fair was improvised. The supercargo . . . was Mr. William Davis of Honolulu, a good businessman and a pleasant companion. during the trip, however, he was too busy to be much in our company⁶¹

Such trading expeditions were also colorfully described by Jo Mora, in his book, *Californios*.

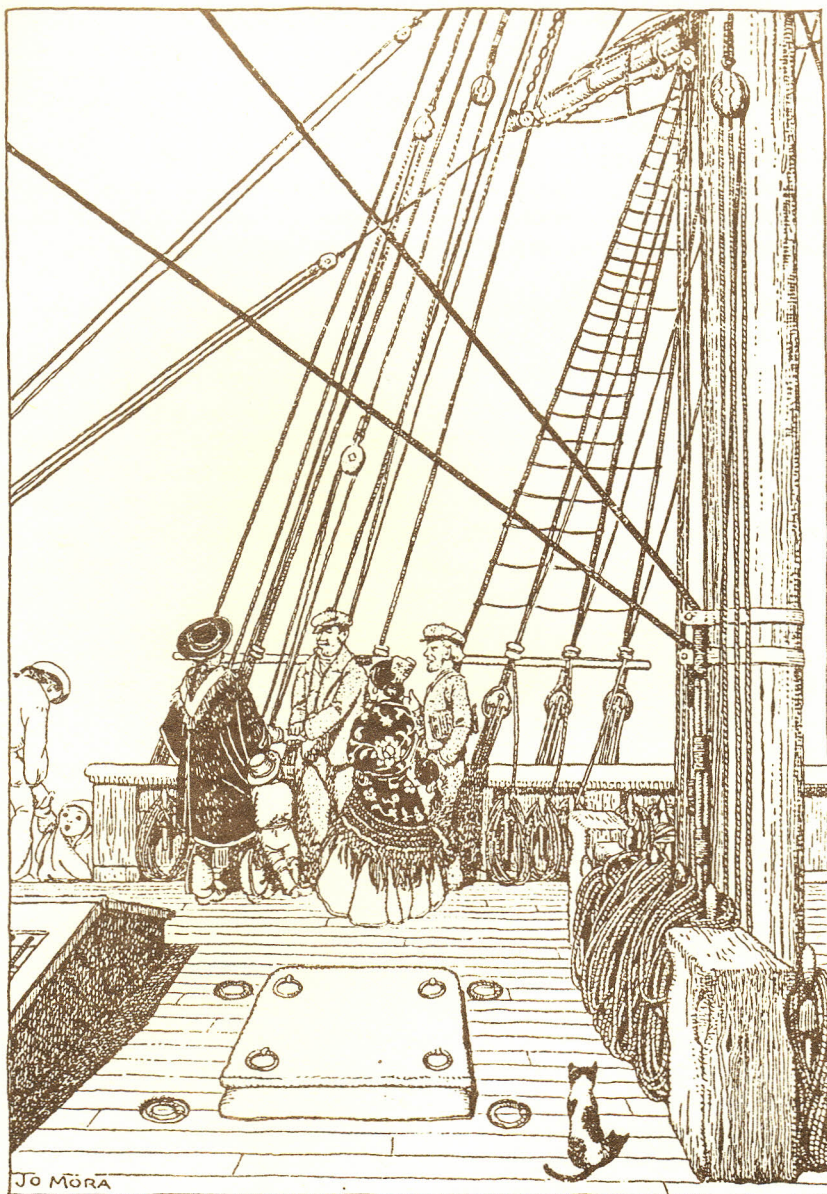
. . . Yankee traders soon learned what the Californio (sic) needed and also what he would buy even if he didn't need it. The supercargoes of the Yankee ships rigged up certain portions of their vessels and outfitted them like a little store. They had shelves, drawers, glassed-in showcases, and scales large and small. They could display and sell anything from a package of needles to a keg of gunpowder and calico by the yard or bolt. Aside from the cheaper, painted kind of furniture made in New England, and the finest in rosewood, walnut, and mahogany, they even offered some beautiful imported pieces from China, for the Yankee merchant overlooked no buying port, and distance meant nothing to his fast-sailing windjammers. From the Orient he also brought jades and fine jewelry and the gorgeous embroidered Chinese shawls, known as "Spanish shawls" and called by the Spaniard *manton de Manila*. The Californio, as I have stated before, was either mighty poor and bought the most economical goods, or he spread himself like a prince, even if he had to buy on the cuff.

The trading ships worked in pairs. It took a long time to gather a shipload of hides and tallow, for the Californio was not the prompt thrifty type who had his hides cured, baled, and stored for instant delivery.

One ship would work month after month up and down the coast and back again several times, picking up green hides here and there and selling goods to the natives. When her supply of goods was exhausted and she had the hold filled, she'd set all sails for "Boston," while her consort arrived and took over where she left off, collecting the debts contracted on a previous trip, picking up cargoes, and selling a new batch of goods.

These operations usually lasted from twelve to twenty-four months. It was a long-winded affair. . .

On arrival, a ship had to call at Monterey, the only official port of entry, to get a coastal license to trade and collect produce until she



California family visits a Yankee trader. Reprinted from "Californios," written and illustrated by Jo Mora, Doubleday & Co., 1949.

was filled, and to pay duty on her full quota of goods for barter and sale. In order for the officials to be able to levy import duty on the goods, the ship had to be unloaded at the customhouse. When that was done, it had to be reloaded before the captain was allowed to cruise up and down the coast, collecting hides and tallow and selling his goods as the occasion presented itself. All this might take a year or two.

Up and down the coast they sailed and let go their mud hooks in all the ports and in the advantageous offshore anchoring grounds, where

there was a fair chance to land their boats on the beach near a spot where ranchers might bring their loaded *carretas* (carts) and unload their hides and the *botas* (bags) of tallow. Imagine how many times they had to drop and weigh anchor, and yet anchoring offshore and sending their boats to the beach was none too easy an operation. During the rainy season bad weather might unexpectedly crop up, and then out to sea the ship would be forced to go, since with the prevailing south and southwest storms and winds, that California coast was no sailor's snug harbor for shore-cruising windjammers.⁽³⁾

In October, 1849, Paty and Davis arrived in Monterey on the *Don Quixote* from San Francisco to find that since their last visit, the port had been occupied and then freed by American naval forces. This was, of course, the visit by Thomas ap Catesby Jones, who had heard a rumor that the United States and Mexico were at war and that the English Navy was about to seize Monterey. Unable to verify the rumor, Jones sailed into the harbor on October 19. Although everything appeared peaceful, Jones decided to take no chances and demanded that Juan B. Alvarado, acting governor, surrender his town to American forces. Alvarado hastily complied. The next day, convinced that the war rumor was indeed false, Jones sought to rectify his impulsiveness. The American flag was lowered and the Mexican standard raised. According to Davis "a salute was then fired from the two (American) vessels in honor of the Mexican flag, and this was responded to by a salute from the fort. All courtesies due from one nation to another were shown, and the town of Monterey was fully restored to the possession and powers of its former possessors, twenty-four hours after it was taken from them."

Jones' ships were still in the harbor when the *Don Quixote* arrived and Paty and Davis paid a call on Jones. He "immediately made us feel at ease in his company," Davis reported. He impressed us as a man of decided ability and withal social and genial." In his book, *Sixty Years in California*, Davis tells of the social functions following the return of Monterey to Mexican sovereignty:

We remained in the harbor of Monterey with the *Don Quixote* about a week, and made frequent visits to the flag-ship, and had many pleasant interviews with the commodore and his officers. It was years since I had heard any good music, and we enjoyed hearing the fine band play at sunset on the quarter-deck of the frigate. Captain Paty and myself sent a little present of fine California wine to the commodore and Captain Armstrong, which we had procured from the vineyard of Don Louis Vigne at Los Angeles. It was highly appreciated by the recipients.

While we were at Monterey, an elegant entertainment was given by the United States consul and other American residents, at the government house, to the commodore and the officers of the vessels. Captain Paty and myself were among the guests. The music, dancing and feasting lasted till a late hour.⁽⁴⁾

Mrs. Paty was also aboard the *Don Quixote* when it arrived in

Monterey and took part in the festivities. According to Davis:

She was from Charlestown, Massachusetts; a woman of fine character, good education, of great intelligence and with excellent conversational powers. I think she was the third American lady who came to this coast; Mrs. T.O. Larkin and Mrs. Nathan Spear preceding her. She was a pioneer of whom the country might well be proud These ladies being the only American women on the coast at that time, were treated with the greatest courtesy and distinction by the officers of the United States squadron.

On arriving at Monterey, she was invited to the flag-ship, and entertained in the pleasantest manner. The invitation was several times repeated, the presence of the ladies being considered a great compliment to those aboard the vessel. It certainly was a most agreeable surprise and gratification to the officers to find in this remote part of the world some of their countrywomen, so refined and intelligent.

I was present on one of the occasions aboard the flag-ship, when Mrs. Paty remarked in a facetious manner, "What a pity, Commodore Jones, that you gave up this beautiful department, after having taken possession." He replied that he would gladly have kept it, but he was compelled to relinquish it.^(a)

Mrs. Paty (later) recalled an incident which took place at the grand entertainment given by the citizens of Monterey, upon the restoration of the town to the Mexican authorities, after the capture by Commodore Jones. Captain Armstrong, of the flagship, was a heavy man, and Captain Paty was small and wiry. Both were fond of dancing, and there was an animated contest between them to see who could waltz the longest, to the amusement of the company. They continued on the floor a long time, the California ladies seeming never to tire of dancing.^(a)

At last, in the presence of the commander of the American fleet in the Pacific, the governor and some of the most illustrious Mexican and foreign dignitaries that could be assembled in Alta California Paty secured a victory over his big rival, who, "succumbed to fatigue" according to Davis. Aside from the thousands of miles Paty had logged across the oceans of the world, the young lad who walked from Plymouth to Boston to save two dollars, had come a long way.

Further excerpts from Captain Paty's log and journal will appear in the September issue of Noticias.

-DLW

FOOTNOTES

1. Ogden, Adele, "Boston Hide Droghers, along the California Coast," California Historical Society Quarterly. Vol. VIII, No. 4, p. 299.
2. Cordua, Theodor, "Memories of Theodor Cordua," California Historical Society Quarterly, Vol. XII, No. 4, p. 281.
3. Mora, Jo, "Californios," Doubleday & Co. 1949, pp. 145-150.
4. Davis, Wm. Heath, : "Sixty Years in California," A.J. Leary, Publisher, San Francisco, 1889, p. 62.
5. *ibid.*, pp. 279-80.
6. *ibid.*, p. 283.

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