

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 15, 1949

May we again quote from the little booklet "Early Printing in California" by Herbert Fahey, and continue the story of the publication of the four-page Californian, the first newspaper published in California and in Monterey.

A prospectus was printed in the first issue of the Californian, A part of the item follows. The exact wording as printed in the paper are used in the various excerpts printed in the booklet:

#### 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.

(Paragraphs will follow advocating freedom of speech and press, severance with Mexico, promoting California's interest – social, civil and religious.)

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 public weal, we shall lay before our reader the freshest domestic intelligence and the earliest foreign news. We commence our publication upon a small sheet, but its dimensions shall be enlarged as soon as requisite materials can be obtained.

The January 28, 1847, issue of the paper carries this account (verbatim):

Our Alphabet – Our type is a Spanish font picked up here in a cloister and has no W's in it as there is none in the Spanish alphabet. I have sent to the Sandwich Islands for this letter, in the mean time we must use to V's. Our paper at present us that used for wrapping cigars; in due time, we will have something better, our object is to establish a press in California, and this we shall in probability be able to accomplish. The absence of my partner for the last three months and my duties as Alcaldd here have deprived our little papes of some of those attentions which I hope it will hereafter receive – Walter Colton.

While the above notice is interesting, it is partly "incorrect", according to Mr. Fahey. In the first place, the type was not a Spanish type, but an American type,

with its full complement of letters. Evidently the printers ran short of the cap W and the lower case w, and used VV's as an emergency. Only correct W's were used in this article and why such a reason was given for using VV's in various parts of the paper is beyond imagination.

In 1850, Walter Colton returned to New York to write from his journals "Three Years in California," published in 1854. Several excerpts from the book follow:

Saturday, August 15, 1846

Today the first newspaper ever published in California made its appearance. The honor, if such it be, of writing its Prospectus, fell to me. It is to be issued on Every Saturday, and is published by Semple and Colton. Little did I think when relinquishing the editorship of the North American in Philadelphia, that my next feat in this line would be off here in California. My partner is an emigrant from Kentucky, who stands six feet eight in his stockings. He is in buckskin dress, a fox skin cap; is true with his rifle, ready with his pen, and is quick at the type-case.

He created the materials of our office out of the chaos of a small concern, which had been used by a Roman Catholic monk in printing a few sectarian tracts. 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 jackknife, were cut into rules and leads. Luckily we found with the press, the greater part of a keg of ink; and now came the main scratch for paper. None could be found, except what was used to envelop the tobacco of the cigar smoked by the natives. A coaster had a small supply of this on board, which we procured. It is in sheets a little larger than the common-sized foolscap. And this is the size of the first paper, which we have christened the Californian.

A crowd was waiting when the first sheet was thrown from the press. It produced quite a little sensation. Never was a bank run upon harder; not, however by people with paper to get specie, but exactly the reverse. One-half of the paper is in English, the other in Spanish. The subscription for the year is five dollars; the price for a single sheet is twelve and half cents; and is considered cheap at that.