

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 16, 1949

Today we will complete the review of the little booklet called "Early Printing in California" by Herbert Fahey, in which he has given the history of Agustin Vicente Zamorano, who brought the first press to Monterey and published the first items west of the Rockies; the story of the first newspaper, the Californian, published by Walter Colton and Robert Semple and the final resting place of the old press.

On Saturday, August 22, 1847 entries in the Californian were: Our little paper, the Californian, made its appearance again today. Many subscribers have sent in their names since our last, and all have paid in advance. It is not larger than a sheet of foolscap; but this foolscap parallel stops, I hope with the shape. Be this as it may, its appearance is liked for with as much interest as was the arrival of the mail by the New Yorkers and the Bostonians in those days when a moon waxed and waned over it transit.

Saturday, September 12

My Partner in the Californian has been absent. All the work of the offices has devolved upon a sailor, who has set type for the whole paper, with fingers as stiff as the ropes around which they have Coiled themselves into seeming fixtures. Yet the "Californian" is out, and makes a good appearance. Who would think, except in these uttermost ends of the earth, of issuing a weekly journal, with only an old tar to set the type.

Semple, who had the sole control of the paper in May 1847, moved the paper and equipment to San Francisco. Later the printing equipment was removed to New Helvetia, or Sutter's Fort, where it was used to print the Placer Times, the first newspaper in the interior of California. Later on, another move, this time to Stockton, in order to produce the Stockton Times. Still another move in 1850 to Sonora, where the old press printed the Sonora Herald. Once again is moved to Columbia, where it came to rest rather tragically. Not entirely paid for – the pioneer press was, unfeelingly dismantled.

In the Daily Alta California printed in San Francisco, issued November 23, 1851, the following article from the Sonora Herald appeared about the Zamorano press. The article was headed "The old Pioneer Press" and the account of the history of the press concludes with:

OLD PIONEER TRESS BURNT

The old Pioneer Press of California, which was recently sold, together with other printing materials, to George W. Gore of the Columbia Star, and for which a balance of \$370 was left unpaid according to the contract, was attached for security. On trial, the jury without hesitation gave the verdict against Mr. Gore. We then proposed to allow any reasonable time for the payment, provided a good bond was given. A counsellor advised to the contrary, and the supposition was, that there would be no bidding at the sale, and that the whole concern would be knocked off at a trifling sum. We instructed a person, however, to bid for us up to a certain amount, and it was knocked off to him at \$310. After packing up the materials and removing them to a store for safe keeping till the next morning, as it was impossible to procure a team at the time, it was proposed to leave the press where it stood until morning and to pay the person having charge of the building for the privilege. But he asked only thirty-two dollars! Whereupon it was thought best to remove it from the premises. It was accordingly taken apart, and all except the frame deposited under roof. The frame, however, being bulky, was left upon the sidewalk. The night was for time for such kind of work, and the opportunity was improved by certain persons, to remove the frame back to its former place, and there it was burned.

As regards our loss, it is nothing at all, for the materials which are of any use to us have been saved. But for the sake of the profession, and for the credit of California, whose first newspaper was printed on this press, we do regret this outrage. The town of Columbia has immortalized herself, and her citizens can hereafter congratulate themselves on being residents of a place which burns up relics valued by every printer, and revered by every man who feels pride in the past history of California.

We sent only yesterday for the charred and half-consumed timber which constituted the frame, and brought it to our office, in front of which it is now deposited for examination by all who fell interested in the relic. It shall be duly labeled and preserved, not only to show what it once was, and in memory of its past services; but also to show to the better members of society who are fast emigrating to California, how different has been the character if some of her settlers. The appearance of the press as it now stands, forms a

chapter in the history of the state; and whenever a State Museum may be established it shall be placed in the collection.

Unfortunately the press did not survive long enough to be placed in a museum. Sonora had a severe fire shortly after the return of the charred frame of the pioneer press and the remains of the historic relic disappeared forever.