

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The finding of the lead scroll in an ancient bottle at Moss Beach near the Monterey Peninsula Country Club recently has led to the interesting discovery that Colonel Roger S. Fitch is a lineal descendant of Sir Francis Drake, the depositor, with his chaplain, of the bottle "at the foot of a tree along a running stream," claiming the country for good Queen Elizabeth of England.

The great-great-great maternal grandfather of Colonel Fitch, who was Samuel Drake, was an ensign in the Revolutionary War. Later in life he was always addressed as Captain Drake. When Colonel Fitch was a very young boy he remembers going to Westfield, Chautauqua County, New York, to visit his grandfather Brewer. In the dining room of the Brewer home there was hung a framed commission, signed by George Washington, naming Samuel Drake an ensign in the Continental Army. This, along with an old watch which was shown to him by his grandmother as she told him the story of the adventures of Captain Drake, the owner of the watch, greatly impressed young Roger Fitch.

After the Revolutionary War, at a time when the estate of the late Sir Francis Drake was to be settled in the English Courts, Captain Drake took ship from Boston for England to present his claim for a share in the estate. It is Colonel Fitch's opinion, as he remembers the stories told to him by his grandparents, that Sir Francis Drake never married and he left no will.

When Captain Drake sailed for England, he took with him a colored body servant, named Sam, on the voyage. The ship came into difficulties off the coast of New Brunswick, and when it became apparent that it was about to flounder he wrote a note to his wife, which, with the watch, he wrapped in an old skin pouch and gave to the servant. In the note he related the condition of the ship and his doubt of his being able to reach shore if the ship did sink. He believed Sam might and requested her to give the faithful servant his freedom if he was able to reach Boston with the message and watch. The ship was wrecked and Captain Drake was drowned along with the valuable papers he was carrying to England.

The servant, Sam, reached the shore of New Brunswick and made his way down that coast and the coast of Maine, which in those early days was populated with

war-like Indians and held great danger to the traveler. He reached Boston, where he deposited the note and the watch, and supposedly was granted his freedom as requested.

In later years when the estate of Colonel Fitch's grandfather was settled by his son, F. B. Brewer Jr., the framed document, citing the commission to Captain Drake, and the watch were sent to some member of the Brewer family, so at present it is not in the possession of the immediate Brewer relatives.

The daughter of Captain Drake, Submit Drake, married William Emerson and their daughter, Julia Emerson, was Colonel Fitch's great grandmother. She passed away when Colonel Fitch was a small boy. She was the fifth in descent from the Emerson who married Rebecca Waldo and it is thought they were probably ancestors of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the famed poet.

Colonel Fitch is the possessor of the family lineage chart, which is most interesting to study, and it is from that document that the above ancestry has been traced and also from the good memory of the Colonel, who had heard the stories of the Drake family from early childhood.

Colonel Fitch is one of the Peninsula's most respected citizens. He was one of the organizers and first president of the Monterey History and Art Association, and is a member of the board of directors of the association and the Monterey Foundation. He was in command at the Presidio of Monterey for several years before the war, after which he retired. He re-entered the service when war seemed imminent, and was in command at Fort Ord during most of the early construction period of that important Army installation. Aside from all his honor on the Peninsula Colonel Fitch was a member of Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders and has attended several of the reunions of that group.

Colonel and Frs. Fitch built a charming home of Monterey architecture on the Monterey Mesa, which was ready for occupancy when he retired at the Presidio of Monterey; and since then they have extended generous hospitality to friends from the Peninsula and abroad.