

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 26, 1950

A Letter Dated 1847

Thomas W. Norris, president of the Monterey History and Art Association and an ardent collector of Californiana, again sent his interesting and unusual Christmas card to his friends throughout the state this year. For more than ten years Mr. Norris has been publishing a series of his rarest and most valuable documents, many of which have now become collectors' items. Most of the printing for the series of booklets have been the very fine work of the Grabhorn Press, the owner of which is a personal friend of Mr. Norris.

The 1950 Christmas remembrance is "A Letter" from Brigadier Gen. Stephen W. Kearny, written from San Diego, Upper California, on January 30, 1847.

In the introduction, Mr. Norris writes: "The controversy between Kearny, Stockton and Fremont, over the governorship of California created an episode that resulted in the court-martial of Colonel Fremont.

"This letter of Brigadier General Kearny gives his stand in the dispute in a most straightforward manner."

The letter is dated Jan'y 30, 1847, and reads:

Sir,

Intend leaving here tomorrow, in the ship Cyane for Monterey and San Francisco to examine these places and the country above here, and decide where to station Col. Stevenson a Regt. Of Volunteers and Capt. Thompkins Compy of Arty (which I hope may shortly arrive here) and to have orders prepared that they may know where to disembark.

Capt. Cooke 1st Dragoons (made by me a Lieut. Col. that he might receive the emoluments and Rd. office which in his present command) reached here yesterday with the Mormon Battalion (350) strong raised by Capt. Allen in Missouri in July last. I hear that it is very doubtful of Col. Price is following him from Santa Fe. Paymaster Chew accompanied Lieut. Col. C., but has no specie—nothing but Treasury drafts, which cannot be cashed in California under a discount of 20 per cent—I am at a loss which he had best do to obtain money to make payments to the troops. We cannot sell those drafts at such or any other discount—it would not be approved of.

The people of California are quiet at this time, but how long they will remain so, is very uncertain. Should Gen'l Castro, Gov. Flores, or any other Mexican officer return here with 200 or 300 Mexicans or Sonorians, I have no doubt, but the people would again rise and give us much trouble—they have been badly managed and domineered over by the Volunteers raised on the Sacramento and below and their feelings are decidedly hostile at this time to the Americans and our government in consequence of it. Our senior officers too have been pursued, as I think, towards the Californians, an imprudent course and far from conciliatory, so that they are quiet from fear, not from love of us. Such quiet may be easily disturbed.

It will most probably be necessary to keep California (even if peace is this day made with Mexico) for a year or two to come, at least one thousand men, and unless a force is raised expressly for the country, as I have previously suggested, Volunteers should be sent here by sea, bringing their stores. Provisions, and money with them. We cannot depend upon raising Volunteers here, and march by land is so long and fatiguing, that men and animals require some months rest after their arrival.

You will see by my officials letters to the Adjutant General, the trouble I have had with Com. Stockton of the Navy and Lieut. Col. Fremont of the Army. It is an official business. If I have been right, I ask for your support and public approval! If wrong I expect neither! I furnished Com. S. with a copy of your letter to me of June 3rd, '46, containing the instructions of the President for me to take the management of affairs, and organize a civil government in this country after we get possession of it, and demanded that he who was then proceeding in that business, should desist from it. His reply says that he suspends me from the command of the troops "in this place" (Ciudad de los Angeles) there were not troops elsewhere to my knowledge in the territory. He would not desist, but went and divested himself of his assumed Rank of Governor, conferred it upon Lt. Col. Fremont, made Mr. Resell (of Missouri) Scty. of State and. In my opinion it was all wrong. We want at this time a steady and firm military government to punish promptly the disturbers of peace.