

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 27, 1950

Gen. Kearny in California

Yesterday we reported in this Diary a portion of a letter written by Brig. Gen. Stephen W. Kearny from San Diego, Upper California, January 30, 1847. In the letter this controversy between Kearny, Stockton and Fremont over the governorship of California is explained. The episode resulted in the court martial of Colonel Fremont. General Kearny gives his stand in the dispute in a most straightforward manner. This letter is the private collection of Thomas W. Norris of Carmel and has been reproduced by him as a Christmas card to his many friends throughout California.

We continue the letter; "I sent to Lt. Col. Fremont a copy of your letter to me of June 18th and called his attention to that part of it, stating that the troops raised in California (his battalion was raised on the Sacramento) would be under my orders and that no change be made in his battalion, without my sanction or approval first obtained. He disregarded your instructions and refused obedience to my orders, stating that he was responsible to Com. Stockton. It is possible that a Naval and Military officer can find countenance in Washington or in the U.S. for such conduct, I will not believe it.

"Upon the appointment of Fremont as governor, Com. S. appointed Lt. Gillespie of the Marines a major and to the command of that battalion, notwithstanding he (Com. S.) also had a copy of your of June 18th.

"I rely upon the President and upon yourself for justice! I have endeavored to pursue a steady and prudent course, and from patriotic motives and to prevent our own countrymen from being arrayed against each other in this part of the country, have even given way to others, who I though and still think were fools and madmen, and prepared to go at any length, without reflecting upon the consequences, to carry their point.

"I shall as I now propose, when I have examined the country, establish my headquarters at Monterey during my continuance in California. But I still hope to receive from you permission to return to Missouri the ensuing summer or fall, provided the peace of the country is firmly established and placed beyond the fear of interruption."

Most respectfully yours, S.W. Kearny, Brig. Gen. The Hon. W. L. Marcy, Sect. of War, Wn.

Walter Colton, in his diary "Three Years in California," written in Monterey, reports on Tuesday, June 26th, 1849; "In intelligence of the death of Gen. Kearny has been received here with many expressions of affectionate remembrance. During his brief sojourn in California, his considerate disposition, his amiable deportment and generous policy, had endeared him to the citizens. They saw in him nothing of the ruthless invader, but an intelligent, humane general, largely endowed with a spirit of forbearance and fraternal regard. The conflict which arrested his progress at Pasquel, and the disaster in which so many of his brave men sunk overpowered, were contemplated, by the more considerate of the inhabitants, rather than a sentiment of regret, than an air of triumph. They seemed to regard these events as a waste of life—as a reckless resistance on their part, which, if successful for a time could only have the effect to continue, for a brief period, the sway of leaders in whose prudence and patriotism they had no confidence. They took leave of him with regret, and have received the tidings of his death with sympathy and sorrow. It is not for me to write his eulogy; it is graven on the hearts of all who knew him. His star set without a cloud; but its light lingers still: When all the watch fires of the tented field have gone out, a faithful ray will still light the shrine which affection and bereavement have reared to his worth."

It was through the generosity of Mr. Norris that many of his most valuable and historic documents have been displayed at Colton Hall from time to time since its opening as a museum. During the Centennial celebration in 1949, the Freedom Exhibit, and Western Museum Conference interesting displays of the Norris documents were of interest to the visitors to Colton Hall, as well as an exhibit of old mining documents, maps and deeds having to do with early mining in California.