

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 11, 1950

A Letter About Old Monterey

William Rich Hutton, a surveyor, came to California in 1847, from his home in Washington, D.C., with his uncle, William Rich, a botanist of some reputation, who was an army paymaster. He remained nearly six years employed, after his army engagement as paymaster's clerk, in surveying, drafting and clerical work.

A few years ago the Friends of the Huntington Library made possible the purchase from the William Hutton's daughters, the Misses Mary A. and Rose Hutton, their father's drawings, diaries and letters, which have been published by the library under the titles, "California, 1847-1852" and "Glances at California, 1847 to 1853."

From one of the early letters of Lieutenant Hutton, written to a friend, we have taken the following paragraphs, knowing that the contents will be of interest to present day citizens of Monterey, the city about which he wrote before the discovery of gold in California.

"Dear Madam: I am utterly at a loss to know what to write to you. The anecdotes which I may have told are almost entirely personal, and not of general interest.

"My first landing in California was at the end of April, 1847. The country was quiet. The Fremont battalion, if in existence, was at Los Angeles. The regiment of New York volunteers was distributed at various points from Sonoma to San Diego with two companies at La Paz in Lower California.

"Company F. Third artillery, was stationed at Monterey Redoubt – a single bastion on the hill above the old Mexican fortification known as 'Jones Fort.' Among the artillery officers were Lieutenants Sherman and Ord. Lieutenant Halleck of the Engineers laid out the 'redoubt' which was built by the artillerymen (on a recent visit to Monterey – perhaps in print somewhere, it has been called Fremont's Fort. Fremont had nothing to do with it).

"General Stephen Kearney was in Monterey until the end of May when he turned over the government to Colonel R.J. Mason and returned overland to St. Louis. 'Major' Fremont arrived from Los Angeles about that time under orders to accompany Kearney to the United States. (California was not yet one of them) – and who was promptly arrested on reaching Fort Leavenworth –

Fremont's behavior had been singular and unaccountable. He had been furnished with money by Commodore Stockton to raise a battalion of volunteers, and had been appointed by him Major of volunteers and Governor of California. General Kearney arrived appointed by the President Governor and with full instructions. Fremont, lieutenant of engineers in the regular army, refused to recognize Kearney or to obey his order until after Commodore Biddle – who ranked Stockton – arrived at Monterey and took control of the situation and recognized the orders of the president.

"Of the native Californians, what can I say? I could write of Dona Angustias Jimeno, who although filled with patriotic hatred of the invader, the conquerors of her country, hearing that an American 'Yankee' officer was ill in a shanty (Dr. Murray's quarters) near her home, went to see him, took him to her house and gave him every attention until his death. This was Lieutenant Minor of the 3rd Artillery. She was thus brought into relations with Murray, Sherman and Halleck, and they soon became warm friends. She was a most attractive woman, handsome, a little stout, agreeable and witty in conversation, well read in older Spanish literature – familiar with Calderon, Lope and Quevedo. Her daughter, Manuelita, was a universal favorite. Several of the American officers were captured by her intelligence and the charming simplicity of her ways. She died when she was about 17.

"Mrs. Hartnell, sister of Mrs. Jimeno, was too much engrossed by the care of her 20 children (or thereabouts) to give much attention to literature – but her house was very gay, the respectable Americans as well as Californians were always welcome and she was never better pleased than when all around her were happy. Teresita, older than her cousin, Manulita, was perhaps a greater favorite and had more than one militaire at her feet. Very tall, lithe, wonderfully most graceful in the waltz. The younger girls of these two families were children at the time referred to.

"Other names could be mentioned – Mrs. Spence, Mrs. Abrego, the Estradas, Isabel Gomez, Mrs. Malarin, Tomasita Amesti – Maria Antonia Malarin, etc.

"In Santa Barbara the family of Don Jose de la Guerra, the king of Santa Barbara, as he has been called, a Montanes, therefore cabezadura, at one time commandante at the post, I have seen the men take off their hats as they rode past his house.

“Many others I could name, in Santa Barbara the remarkable family of de la Guerra, inclosing Dona Angustias and Dona Teresa (Mrs. Hartnell) of Monterey, the Carillos – in Los Angeles; the Arguellos – including the beautiful Eulalia with her young Aunt Teresita. How Halleck and myself would take turns to talk with one or the other – the dignified father and I suppose, grandfather, Don Jose Arguello, always in the room as charming in their own way as the lovely girls.

“Dona Isidora Bandini and her sister, Mrs. Stearns, and in San Diego the very pinnacle of Mexican gentleness, Don Juan Bandini and his magnetic young wife, Dona Dolores. Their youngest Dolores, also if I remember, who married Charley (Johnson? Robinson?) was too young to show her mother’s qualities. Of the women in California I cannot speak too highly. Of education – most of them could read and write, but after that it was a matter of books that fell into their hands. Those with better opportunities were well informed, while others, living in country places could sometimes not know what book to trust, being unable to distinguish fact from fiction.

“They were all graceful dancers, agreeable in conversation, attentive to their religious, as well as their domestic duties.

“The young men were generally managers of the ranchos with but little to do the greater part of the year, they led a happy, gossipy life, having as far as I could see but few vices – intoxication was rare. There may have been more or less gambling but none on the surface.”