

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 6, 1951

### **Eight Dimes Equal One Dollar**

Yesterday we began the "Narrative of a Voyage New York to Monterey, via Panama in 1849," by E.L. Williams, a former resident of Monterey and the grandfather of Paul Pioda of Salinas and Mrs. Fred Treat of Carmel.

In the lengthy diary Mr. Williams describes the steamer, "Crescent City" upon which he sailed from New York for Chagres and his fellow passengers or cabin-mates, "one a Yankee sea captain and the other a quiet well-behaved printer from Cincinnati, who was going to California to hand down to the future generation an account of what he may see. He was probably a reporter on a newspaper."

Mr. Williams wrote an interesting paragraph telling of his forethought in New York: "I will state here that in New York I picked up a pamphlet telling one how to do, and what to do when going to California via Chagres. From this little pamphlet I learned that eight dimes were equal to one dollar and to have a bargain ratified before an alcalde, and other items and hints which I found of great value to me." Mr. Williams states that he still had the pamphlet with him in Santa Cruz in 1903.

Two fellow passengers and Williams decided to get to shore as soon as possible and hire a boat to take them up the Chagres River and share the expense. There were 609 persons waiting on shore to be transported and all in a hurry to get to California. "I paid over the 50 dollars asked, all in dimes, eight to a dollar, so I really paid forty dollars," writes the author of the narrative.

One of the passengers had a brother in New York who was in the canning business and he was on his way to San Francisco to establish an agency. Besides his large trunk, he had with him six boxes containing two dozen each of canned oysters, clams, and lobsters. The other man had an equally large trunk, and all of this did not leave much room for Williams and his small bundle and the three boatmen with their poles and paddles but no oars.

On Tuesday, November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1849, Williams and his fellow passengers arrived at Crucesat, having been ninety hours on the river and "boated about 90 miles." "With what delight, I stepped ashore and considered I

was 21 miles from Panama and from there would commence my sea journey to Monterey."

After describing Panama and the inhabitants, Mr. Williams has this interesting bit to relate: "We were obliged to wait the arrival of animals from Panama with some two millions in gold and silver – the silver in bars exposed to view, and the gold in boxes, two of either comprising a mule load.

"And now came a party from California on their return to New York. One of them I knew. He was very disappointed and dissatisfied. He had on a pair of buckskin breeches which he pulled off and gave to me saying that I would need them when crossing the Isthmus of Panama. They were bespattered with mud. I took them and we parted.

"On the 29<sup>th</sup>, at 6 a.m. I was on board a small horse with the buckskin breeches on and in company with Mr. Purdy, who later became lieutenant governor of California. We set out and such a road! ... The mud up to the horses' girth. We could not go faster than a walk and it was very tedious when about 5 o'clock we were in sight of Panama. Just inside the wall around the city, I was met by a man who asked me if I had a ticket to California. He said 'I will give you five hundred dollars for it.' (I had paid \$100 in New York). Then he offered seven hundred and fifty dollars, to which I still said, no.

"I met another man very soon who asked the same question and received the same answer. He finally said: 'I will give you one thousand dollars for your ticket.' I told him no I would not sell at any price and added there were hundreds of passengers behind me who would gladly sell, and so it turned out.

(More Tomorrow)