

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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'A Bad Man From Way Back'

When E.L. Williams, whose narrative of a trip to California by boat we have been reviewing these past few days, found his cabin on board the historic schooner "California" in 1849, it was already occupied by a sick man. So the young man took the hammock he had purchased in Panama and swung it on the forward part of the ship near the bow. There he explains was a hatchway opening into the hold and each corner of the hatch, at a post overhead was a similar hatch opening on deck. He swung the hammock to two of the posts so it hung on the bias, where the only light there was from the full moon. There was a wind sail that sent down now and then a very little air.

Williams goes into considerable detail about the closeness of his sleeping fellow passengers. He had been asleep but a short time when he was awakened by someone on his left shouting at him and saying "Get out of here." He paid no attention, when a second time a person, with a volley of coarse oaths directed toward him said, "If you don't get out from there I will cut you down. You are keeping the air from me." Again he reports he paid no attention but at that moment the person jumped out of his bunk and approached the head of Williams's hammock with a large long knife open in his hand.

From the boy's right hand side a pistol gleamed in the moonlight, behind a determined voice which said, according to William's memory: "You attempt to cut the boy down and I will blow a hole through you, you infernal blackleg southerner, I know you. You used to run a gambling game at New Orleans and you robbed everybody. Get away from that boy."

Soon Williams was the center of a cyclone, the passengers all crowded forward and finally the officers of the steamer came and restored order.

It turned out that the man with the knife who purposed to cut the boy down was named Cora and it was reported that he and his three companions had 40 thousand dollars and intended to start a gambling bank in San Francisco. They continued to make themselves very unpleasant until the captain put them in irons from

which they were released the day after their promise to behave themselves.

Charles Cora, after his arrival in California shot down in cold blood and killed a United States Marshal named W.H. Richardson, for which he was hanged by the Vigilante Committee. In the early 1900's Mr. Williams recalls that a newspaper writer commenting upon the acts of the Committee justified the hanging of Cora and said that he was a bad man from way back; that on his way to California in 1849 from Panama he had endeavored to stab a young man who had not given him any provocation, and would have done so had he not been prevented by other passenger. Evidently the writer had been one of William's follow travelers.

After the tumult mentioned Williams' reports in his diary, "I slept soundly in my hammock until daylight." Anyone accustomed to a hammock will roll out feet first but fortunately for the young man he looked before he leaped, when to his surprise and horror there was a deep, black gulf beneath him. Some person had removed the hatch during the night.

At San Bias, the hero of our narrative had another exciting experience. It was dark when they arrived and the stay was shot. As the paddle wheels were revolving, they had made not more than two revolutions, when loud and strenuous cries were heard proceeding from the paddle box which was quickly opened and there was brought out a half drowned native who had concluded he could get to California's gold by stealing up the paddle wheel. He had escaped death by a miracle and was sent ashore.