

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 27, 1951

Whiling Away The Public Time

A bill that State of California to N.A.H. Ball, Dr., dated Sacramento, 1853, read: "For expenses in consequences in conveyance of a block of marble for the Washington Monument, from hence to Sacramento to depositing on board ship at \$950, exclusive of freight (free), I certify the above bill to be correct.

John Biglers.

The Washington Monument in Washington, D.C., is of special interest to Californians for this state had a part in its erection back in 1850. Among the items in the collection of Californiana owned by Thomas W. Norris of Carmel are several different items relating to the memorial stone sent from California to Washington to be placed in the monument. We have been granted the permission to reprint them here.

In the Oakland Tribune of April 11, 1943, there appeared this story: "Ninety-three years ago California sent a memorial stone of gold quartz to Washington, D.C., as its contribution to the Washington Monument.

"The stone cost \$943. It was furnished out of the proceeds of a small bond issue. For one reason or another, the bonds were never called in.

"The State Assembly decided today it was about time to erase the old debt which with accrued interest at six per cent, now amounts to \$2,277,500. Here's the story of the snowball bonds as related by Assemblyman Lee T. Bashore, in winning approval of his bill to redeem the obligation.

"The original bond issue, authorized before California Statehood, bore interest at the rate of 36 per cent a year. It was refinanced in 1851 soon after the admission to the Union, at a lower rate. Then followed two more refundings, in 1857 and 1873. More of the 1857 issue was purchased by the University of California and the State School Land Fund.

The bonds matured in 1893, but the state could not redeem them. The voters in 1892 had refused to refinance them again, so the legislature after paying the few held by private individuals provided for payment of interest on the endowment holding indefinitely.

"The Memorial stone, Bashore said, is still on the Washington Monument. Placed on the 120 foot level, it

carries the inscription: 'California, youngest sister of the Union, sends her golden tribute to the memory of its father.'"

Now we will skip back to July 24, 1850, when a letter was written from Washington, D.C., which read: "We have the pleasure to acknowledge the receipt through Messrs. John Bidwell and Henry Schoolcraft, of a block of gold bearing quartz and sundry specimens of gold ore and cinnabar, intended as an offering of the State of California to evince her patriotic desire to contribute to the National Monument to the memory of George Washington, now in process of erection in this city.

"We have also to acknowledge the receipt b the same hands of a communication from you, transmitting a copy of certain joint resolution of our State Legislature relative to this subject.

"We beg to assure you that we will immediately take the necessary steps to fulfill the instructions transmitted to us, and we cannot refrain from remarking that nothing could be more gratifying than the evidence which is furnished by these proceedings, that the people of one section deprived of the privilege of voting, should wish to commemorate the glory of the great man whose life is the common heritage of free man.

We have the honor to be very respectfully, your obedient servants, William M. Gwin, Edward Gilbert and J.C. Fremont."

The above letter was evidently lost enroute to California from Washington for it was forwarded to the addressee from Chico Ranch on July 1st, 1951, with the following enclosure: "Sir: By the last mail I received the enclosed communication relative to the then block of quartz for the Washington Monument. How or where the lazy letter could while away nearly a year of public time apparently without shame or remorse, I pretend not to determine, I can only say that it has positively arrived.

I am very truly your obedient servant.

J. Bidwell