

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Sawmills, Flourmills, A Tale of Two Towns

We have found a fascinating story written by two sisters, Mrs. Rebecca Deleissegues and Mrs. Lucretia Mylar, telling of the early days in Corralitos and Soquel, two picturesque communities in San Cruz County familiar to almost every resident of the central coast counties.

The story of the beginning of these two towns is told by the daughters of Ben Hames, millwright, surveyor, builder and adventurer, who founded the town of Soquel. Hames with his brother, John Hames, erected the first sawmills and first flour mills in these towns and thereby gave them their start as California communities.

How these two typical American pioneers left their boyhood home in New York, lost touch with one another for years, and were finally re-united in San Cruz County after lives of adventure in South America and other strange places, and the story of their activities in the Corralitos-Soquel section, makes an interesting story and a valuable contribution to California's historical record

Benjamin Hames, the founder of Corralitos, in 1855, or possibly earlier was the son of Benjamin Hames and Rebecca Harding of Hardin. The elder Hames was a native of New York and a millwright by trade, who came west in the early days when Michigan was being settled and located at Battle Creek, Calhoun County, where he built the first flour mill in what was destined to become one of the greatest milling and cereal manufacturing centers in America. He resided in Battle Creek until his death in 1850.

The daughters, Mrs. Deleissegues and Mrs. Mylar, wrote in 1929, that their father, Ben Hames Jr., who was born in Rochester, N.Y., on June 1, 1823, left his father's home before the latter migrated west to Michigan. The young man took passage to California, evidently in the early 40's, on the bark "Mazippa." En route to South America he made the acquaintance of a minister who was a fellow passenger, and the clergyman presented him with a Bible, which his daughter, Rebecca, still treasured as a valuable keepsake.

After a cruise that took him to the Hawaiian Islands, Hames came back to South America and went to Santiago, Chile. He built a flour mill and then moved to Valparaiso, Chile, where he erected another flour mill. After living in Chile for some time he married a cultured and refined woman, Mary Carmen Laing, the daughter of an Englishman, Capt. George Foster Laing and his wife Francisca Joffre Laing. Mrs. Hames was born in Valparaiso, July 8, 1832.

Two daughters, Frances and Lucretia, were born to them and in 1852 they took ship for California, accompanied by the children's nurse, Mariquita, and Mrs. Hames' youngest sister, Andrea Laing.

Captain Laing and his wife, their youngest son, William, and Mrs. Laing's daughter, Mrs. Rosa Post and her son, Henry, preceded the Hames family to California, also making the trip aboard a clipper ship, and took up their residence in Oakland, then a small village.

The clipper ship was laden with lumber. The wife of the captain of the ship was making the trip with her husband, and Mrs. Hames and her children were allowed to make the journey because the two families were friends and because they would be company for the captain's wife. The passage required two months and such heavy storms were encountered that most of the cargo was thrown overboard to prevent the ship from floundering.

Mrs. Hames, her daughters say, brought orange trees and several varieties of flowering garden plants with her, managing to save many of them, including some calla lilies, fuchsias, carnations etc., and they were the first plants of the kind in California.

(More Tomorrow)