

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

June 26, 1951

With a High Grey Beaver Hat And a Red Bandana Handkerchief

An article entitled "Corralitos, Gem of the Pajaro Valley" was published in April 1929, which is of interest in Monterey in 1951, because of the nearness of the community mentioned and because many of the pioneers mentioned were also pioneers of Monterey. Therefore we are repeating many of the persons and incidents mentioned in the Diary yesterday.

Mr. Benjamin F. Hames, the founder of the town of Corralitos in Santa Cruz County, landed at Yerba Buena, which is now San Francisco, about 1840, and lived there for a while. About the time of his removal to Oakland he heard that his brother, John Hames, was living at Soquel in Santa Cruz County. John Hames, who was born in Orange County, N.Y. in 1811, had left his home many years before Benjamin started his travels, and the two brothers had lost touch with each other. Ben Hames therefore moved his family to Soquel where there was a happy reunion.

Another brother, David, who had left home early in life, was never heard from. John Hames had, like his brother, led an adventurous life which had taken him to South America. In 1842 and 1843 he had been in Peru and Ecuador, where he had worked at his trade of millwright, and he had traveled extensively before he reached California, going first to Niles where he built a saw mill, then a flour mill at Soquel, a comfortable home at that place and another saw mill a bit further up the Soquel canyon.

Ben Hames built a flour mill at Hayward and then built the Cascade flour mill at Aptos, which is now known as Rio Del Mar. This mill had long since been destroyed but a small portion of the foundation is still to be seen in the old town.

Ben Hames afterward built a flour mill at Chorro creek, a few miles northeast of San Luis Obispo. It was called Eagle Mill and was owned by Sam Pollard and Mr. Childs. Ben and John Hames were partners in a mill built by them at Corralitos.

Two babies were born to Mr. and Mrs. Ben Hames, Rebecca, Dec. 9, 1854, and Bennie, April 26, 1856, both of whom were christened in the Holy Cross church in Santa Cruz in 1857 by Father Rouselle.

In 1855 Ben Hames bought several hundred acres of land in a beautiful place surrounded by hills and called it "Corralitos," meaning little corrals. He built a mill there and it was leased to O.P. Wilson of Soquel, so the Wilson family moved to Corralitos and lived in a house near the store kept by Fischer and Schwartz of Santa Cruz. The Hames family moved into the Wilson house at Soquel.

While the Hames family were living in Soquel, Grandfather and Grandmother Laing came from Oakland to live with them, Grandfather Laing had learned the ship's carpenter trade when a youth at New Castle-on-the-Tyne, and shipped aboard a vessel when a young man. Years had passed and he never returned home, but after a year or so at Soquel he decided to visit England again and settle his affairs in Newcastle, then return to California to make his permanent home.

In those days ships visited Santa Cruz only on very rare occasions, though they came frequently to San Francisco. Grandfather Laing decided to take passage on the first boat that came to Santa Cruz, and when he learned that a vessel was in the harbor, he hurriedly prepared for his trip.

There were no stage coaches in those days or any other means of conveyance, and he had to walk a few miles to Santa Cruz to take the ship, bound, as he thought, for England. His daughters wrote in 1929, that they could see him yet, with his gray beaver high hat of which he was so proud, and his clothing tied up in a red bandana handkerchief. It was before the day of the carpet bag in California and suit cases were unheard of. But his preparations were in vain for when he reached Santa Cruz the ship had sailed. Almost sick with disappointment, he walked back to Soquel and the voyage was postponed.

A few months after this event, Grandmother Laing fell ill and died on February 4, 1856, and was buried at Soquel. Mrs. Deleissegues writes that she remembers her grandmother as always kind and good. One of her cherished possessions was a large yellow pitcher with a blue band around it full of doughnuts and she was very liberal with them and other goodies. She always kept her hair curled, according to her granddaughter. Her father was Jean Pierre Joffre, brother of the great grandfather of the famous French general of that name. Her mother was Mercedes Covarrubia, who was born in Spain. Jean Pierre Joffre died at El Almendral, their home in Valparaiso, Chile, at the age of 88 years.

(More Tomorrow)