

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Wherever Pepper Grows**

The description of Rancho Patrocinio de Alisal, the home of W.E.P. Hartnell near Salinas, is well described in Carl Meyer's "Bound for Sacramento," translated from the German language by Ruth Frey Axe. The book was written in 1855—not as a journal but as a series of work pictures.

The Rancho, Meyers writes, is over thirty leagues in circumference. There were at the time of his visit eight thousand head of cattle and several thousand head of horses and sheep grazing there.

Not far from the dwelling was a silver mine which had been operated very successfully and that constituted the main reason for the writer's visit there. It had been reported that the mine was exhausted but after a short search he rediscovered the vein and bought it back into operation.

The mine in 1855 consisted of pure silver, lead ore and limestone embedded in quartz which is occasionally characterize as itacolumite. "There are several such silver mines in California" he reported, "most of them belonging to the church Fathers, and the missions produced enormous wealth from them. They are abandoned now and all kinds of fairy tales have made them terrifying and inaccessible for the superstitious people. A time may come however, when tales of past glory will open them up again and they will vie with the mines of the great gold rush...to wipe out the picture of the golden horror of the world of finance, but 'where gold speaks, other speech carries no weight.' A higher valuation of silver would perform wonders."

Meyer described the vegetable garden at the Rancho, which was easy to water, and leaving nothing to be desired. Under the care of a French gardener it produced during the whole year the most varied and delicious native and foreign vegetables.

"The sight of the native garden plants is also pleasing. The eye lingers long with pleasure upon the native casaba melon (*crescentia cujete*), on the vine covered earth-wall, on the dark green *rugueta* bed, or on the pepper plant which chokes my praise in my mouth by its tongue burning pod and without which life for the California ranch dweller is as impossible as for Mexican. If he is offered both a pepper pod and a strawberry-like

*granadita*, he will disdain the latter. Chili verde must never be absent from his table; it's like the white bread to the Frenchman. Without chili all food is tasteless, and without chili his customs would be less fiery. Fiery customs are to be found wherever pepper grows," is Mr. Meyer's opinion.

Of Mr. Hartnell, Meyers writes: "Mr. Hartnell is a born Englishman. He has been in this country for thirty years and is happily married to a Californian who presented him with twenty-two children, fourteen of whom are still living, the oldest son being twenty-seven year old and the youngest being baptized at the time of my visit at the rancho.

"Mr. Hartnell was educated in Germany and speaks all modern languages fluently. He left nothing undone to have his children educated according to his standards and always kept a European tutor for his purpose.

"I was not surprised therefore to find thoroughly educated people and everything which makes society pleasant in the middle of a broad prairie in this far corner of the world. Every child had musical training and brass, and string instruments were played from the French horn to the piano. Every evening suitable instruments were heard together and signaled the beginning of the *tertulia*."