

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Editor Wore A Buckskin Dress

One hundred and give years ago tomorrow, August 15, 1846, the first newspaper ever published in California made its appearance. The honor of writing its prospectus fell to Walter Colton, a minister and the first Alcalde of Monterey. It was planned to issue the paper every Saturday according to the announcement by Semple and Colton, the publishers.

Five years ago tomorrow Monterey welcomed scores of prominent and interesting and important newspaper people, assembled here in honor of the one-hundredth anniversary of California's first newspaper.

In the broad sense, of course Commodore Sloat's landing to seize the vast empire known as California – 600 square miles of territory – was infinitely more important than the publishing of the little four-page Californian. But, from a strictly local viewpoint, concentrated publicity value of the newspaper Centennial was tops in Monterey on that date.

Colton wrote in his "Three Years in California" that little did he think that when he relinquished the editorship of The North American in Philadelphia, that his next feat in that line would be in California at Monterey. Robert Semple was an emigrant from Kentucky, who stood six feet eight in his stocking feet. "He wore," according to Colton, "a buckskin dress, a fox skin cap; was true with his rifle, ready with his pen, and quick at type-case.

He created the materials for the office out of the chaos of a small concern, which had been used by a Roman Catholic priest in printing a few sectarian tracts. The press was old enough to be preserved as a curiosity, the mice has burrowed in the balls, he stated, there were no rules, no leads, and the type was [rusy] and all in pi (meaning disorder). It was only by scouring that the letters could be made to show their faces. A sheet or two of tin was procured by the partners, and these, with a jack knife, were cut into rules and leads. Luckily they found with the press the greater part of a keg of ink; and now came the main scratch for the paper.

No paper could be found, except what was used to envelope the tobacco of the cigar smoked in Monterey by the natives. A coaster had a small supply of this on board and Colton and Semple procured that. It was in sheets a little larger, wrote Colton, than the common

size foolscap and this was the size of the first paper, which they christened The Californian.

Though of small dimensions, the first number, Colton declared, was as full of news as the black walnut is of meat. They had received by courier during the week, intelligence from all the important military posts through the territory. Very little of it had transpired before the paper reached the public. They had also printed the declaration of war between the United States and Mexico, with an abstract of the debate in the Senate.

A crowd was waiting when the first sheet was thrown from the press. It produced quite a sensation Colton wrote that never was a bank run upon harder; not however, by people with paper to get specie, but exactly the reverse. One half of the paper was printed in English and the other half in Spanish. The subscription for a year was five dollars; the price of a single issue was 12 ½ cents.

The four-page Californian was two columns wide, of 21 picas, with the Zamorano type used. By the aid of translator William E.P. Hartnell, the editors were able to print half of the paper in Spanish. The type was placed directly against column rules. There were many terrible mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

For the one-hundredth anniversary of the publication of The Californian, publishers throughout the state gathered in Monterey. Executive meetings of the California Newspaper Publishers Association were held at Del Monte Lodge, dinner at the Monterey Peninsula Country Club, a tea for the ladies at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Allen Griffin in Pebble Beach, J.R. Knowland, chairman, Centennial Committee spoke on "California's First Newspapers" and Honorable Earl Warren, Governor of California, titled his address "One Hundred Years of Progress."

Dr. Hugh Dormody, mayor of Monterey in 1946, and members of the council honored the members of the newspaper fraternity at a reception in the newly restored Convention hall on the second floor of Colton hall. The Monterey Peninsula Herald printed a facsimile of the first issue of The Californian, with an insert stating that the paper was sponsored by the California Newspaper Publishers Association and that it was believed that the paper had been printed in the Old Quartel.