

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Journal Of a Tour**

"What I saw in California, being the journal of a tour by the Emigrant route and South Pass of the Rocky Mountains, across the continent of North America, the Great Desert Basin, and through California in the years 1846, 1847," has just been loaned to me by Mrs. May R. Hare. It is a fascinating story of the mode of travel, conditions and people of California in its infancy, written by Edwin Bryant, "late Alcalde" of San Francisco, from his personal diary, and published in 1848 by D. Appleton & Co.

In the preface the author writes, "In the succeeding pages, the author has endeavored to furnish a faithful sketch of the country through which he traveled – its capabilities, scenery and population. He has carefully avoided such embellishment as would tend to impress the reader with a fake or incorrect idea of what he saw and describes. He has invented nothing to make his narrative more dramatic and amusing than the truth may render it."

Edwin Bryant, with two companions left Louisville, Ky., on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, 1846; and arrived at Independence, Missouri, the starting point on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May.

"Following the example of others more experienced in these matters than ourselves," wrote Bryant, "we determined to procure oxen, instead of mules for our wagon, as we originally intended. Accordingly I purchased three yoke of oxen which it was believed would be a team sufficiently powerful for the transportation of our luggage and provisions. The average price paid per oxen was \$21.67, which was considered very cheap."

The trio engaged a man who had spent some time in the Rocky Mountains as a servant of the trading and trapping companies, for driver and cook and the cattle were placed under his charge to educate. Soon after leaving Independence, Bryant was elected chairman of a meeting to elect officers of the emigrant company bound for California.

The number of wagons belonging to the company was 63; of men 119; of women, 59; children, male and female, 110; pounds of breadstuffs, 58,489; of bacon, 38,030; of powder, 1,065; of lead, 2,557; number of guns, mostly rifles, 144, pistols 94. The number of cattle

was not reported, but it was estimated at 700, including loose stock and horses, 150.

Like Walter Colton and several other recorders of the early days of California, Bryant wrote in diary form. He does not state whether or not he intended, at the time of recording the day by day happenings of the journey half way across the American continent, to later publish these notations in book form.

He notes off and on the abundance of wild game but the difficulty encountered in procuring it. A herd of antelope was seen but their fleetness of foot prevented their being shot. When a fine fat doe was brought in June 4<sup>th</sup>, it was the first game of any consequence that had been killed since the journey commenced in April. Salt meat had been their diet previous to this date. He estimated the number of emigrants on the road bound for Oregon and California at about 3,000.

Bryant must have been somewhat of a botanist, at least he was interested in noting each flower and shrub he saw along the trail. For instance he wrote: "The wild sage is the prevailing vegetation on the table-land and on the sides of the hills, giving to them a dark and shaggy aspect. The cactus continues to display its yellow and sometimes crimson blossoms on all sides."

In another notation made the following month, Bryant wrote: "The mirage has deceived us several times during the day's march. When thirsting for water, we could see sometimes at the right, sometimes to the left, and at other times, in front, representations of lakes and streams of running water, bordered by waving timber, from which a quivering evaporation was ascending and mingling with the atmosphere. But, as we advanced, they would recede or fade away entirely, leaving nothing but a barren and arid desert. The lupin is blooming on our camp ground. Distance 28 miles.

I saw several Indians today at a distance, but they ran from us, and concealed themselves in the willows," wrote our author one day, but the notes for other days were not so satisfactory as to the native conduct, although the entire party of emigrants arrived in California without any serious conflicts.

(More Tomorrow)