

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Liberal Application Of Spur and Whip

"We were in our saddles and under way, very early this morning (August 18, 1846)" wrote Edwin Bryant in his diary which he later published under the title "What I Saw in California." For breakfast he and his companions had had coffee, and fried bacon; "the last of which, by the way, has become very rancid, and is covered with a thick coating of the dust of the desert."

Seeing specks on the landscape at an apparent five or six miles distance, Bryant determined to approach the campers and obtain from them, if they had it to spare, provisions sufficient to carry his group to the settlements in California. He knew the specks to be covered wagons and so increasing the speed of his mule by a "liberal application of spur and whip, it was not long before the wagons were approached."

It might be interesting to quote here Bryant's description of the hospitality of the California emigrant. "I must remark here by the way, that the sign of an emigrant wagon in these wildernesses and deserts produces the same emotions of pleasure as are felt by the wayworn and benighted traveler, within the boundaries of civilization, when approaching some hospitable cottage or mansion on the roadside. More intense perhaps because the white tent cloth of the wagon is a certain sign of welcome hospitality, in such form as can be afforded by the ever liberal proprietor, who without stint, even though he might have but a single meal, would cheerfully divide it among his stranger visitors. Civilization cannot always boast such dispensers of hospitality; but among the emigrants to the Pacific, it is nearly universal."

Messrs. Craig and Stanley in the course of the afternoon although their supply of provisions was not more than equal to their needs, supplied Bryant and his party with a quantity of flour and bacon.

Another amusing incident recited by Bryant in "What I Saw In California" was the party's encounter with a number of Digger Indians, a happening of August 18, 1846. Two Diggers had come into their camp about sunset. One was mounted on a miserable looking horse and the other walking. The mounted man was the spokesman. After the first greeting and shaking of

hands, he asked for a smoke. A pipe was produced, filled with tobacco and lighted.

Bryant took his turn at the pipe and puffed with a gusto equaling that of the two naked visitors. After the smoking was over, he wrote, conversation was commenced. When one of the party spoke English the chief Indian would invariably imitate with great precision the sound of each word at the end of the sentence. The remarkable accuracy of the imitation accompanied by comic action caused peals of laughter.

On August 25, after much excitement, experiencing many hours without water, little food, encounters with both savage and friendly Indians, and loss of animals, Bryant and party arrived in California

Bryant wrote in his diary: "About 2 o'clock p.m. we suddenly and unexpectedly came in sight of a small lake, some four or five miles in length, and two miles in width ... On every side, except the river outlet the lake is surrounded with high mountains of great elevation, heavily and darkly timbered with pine, firs and cedars ... The sheet of water just noticed, is the head of the Truckee River and is called by the emigrants who first discovered and named it, Truckee Lake."

Then Bryant goes on to tell how the river and lake got its name. A party of emigrants, with but little knowledge of the country, and the difficulties obstructing their progress late in the autumn of 1844, were attempting to force their way through these mountains to California. They were lost and nearly discouraged. The snows fell before they reached the pass; and death was staring them in the face. At the very crisis of their distress, an Indian made his appearance, and in a most friendly manner volunteered his services to guide a portion of the party over the mountains.

His appearance and manners resembled so much those of a man by the name of Truckee, who happened to have been the friend of one of the party, that they gave the Indian the name of Truckee and called the river and lake, along which he conducted them, by the same name.

This same Indian (Truckee) was the chief of the two who had encamped with Bryant and his party and with whom Bryant had smoked the pipe of peace. He and his brother afterward came into California with a company of emigrants; and accompanied the California battalion

on its march from Monterey to the Pueblo of Los Angeles.