

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

August 21, 1951

### **Too Fatigued to Listen**

Following the arrival of Edwin Bryant and his party at Truckee in California, he recalls in his diary, "What I Saw in California," their visit with a Mr. Johnson from whom they learned that General Taylor, after having met and defeated the Mexican forces in four pitched battles, killing an incredible number, some forty or fifty thousand, had triumphantly marched into the City of Mexico. This was noted on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1846.

After receiving this news from their host, the emigrant informed him that they had been for some time without food, and were in a state bordering on starvation. One of the men immediately started off on a gallop to his cabin, and soon returned with a pan of unbolted flour and some tallow to cook it with. This, he said, was all he had, and if such had not been the case, he would have brought something more. The men could not comprehend the use of the tallow in cooking. They afterwards learned that beef tallow in California is used for culinary purposes in the same manner that hog's lard is with the easterner; and they discovered the prejudice could be done away with through habit.

Mr. Johnson gave the emigrants the first number of the first newspaper ever published in California, entitled the "Californian," and published and edited at Monterey by Dr. Robert Semple, a native Kentuckian. The paper was two weeks old, according to Bryant, but from the columns of this small sheet they gleaned some further items of general intelligence from the United States, all of great interest to the newcomers. "The leading paragraph," wrote Bryant in his diary, "under the editorial head, was, in substance, a call upon the people of California to set about the organization of territorial government, with a view to immediate annexation to the United States.

"This seemed and sounded very odd. We had been traveling in as straight a line as we could, crossing rivers, mountains and deserts, nearly four months beyond the bounds of civilization, and for the greater distance beyond the boundaries of territory claimed by our government; but here, on the remotest confines of the world, as it were, where we expected to visit and explore a foreign country, we found ourselves under American authority, and about to be annexed' to the American Union. Distance 17 miles.

When the foreigners (as all who were not born in California were called at that time) arrived at Sutter's Fort, they were met by two Indian sentinels pacing to and fro before it, and several Californians sitting in the gateway, "dressed in buckskin pantaloons and blue sailor shirts with white stars worked in the collars,"

Bryant reports that he asked for Captain Sutter. He was answered in substance: "Perhaps you are not aware of the great changes which have recently taken place in California; that the fort now belongs to the United States and that Captain Sutter, although he is in the fort, has no control over it." He was going into a minute history of the complicated circumstances and events which had produced this result, when he was informed that the emigrants were too fatigued to listen, but that they would be happy to see Captain Sutter.

Captain Sutter soon appeared and was most cordial while informing his visitors that he no longer had control of his property and that the fort was occupied by soldiers under the command of Mr. Kern, thus making it impossible for him to invite them inside the fort. A servant soon brought a supply of beef, salt, melons, onions and tomatoes, for which no compensation would be received. The travelers proceeded to a grove of oak trees two miles west of the fort and a half mile from the Sacramento River.

Bryant concluded the entry in his diary on September 1<sup>st</sup>. "With sincere and devout thankfulness I laid myself on my hard bed, to sleep once more within the confines of civilization. Since we left our homes, April 18, 1846, none of our party has met with any serious accidents or disaster. With the small number of only nine men, we have traveled from Fort Laramie to Sutter's Fort, a distance of nearly 1700 miles over trackless and barren deserts, and almost impassable mountains; through tribes of savage Indians, enduring great hardships and privations and here we all are in good health. We have had no quarrels with Indians, but on the contrary, whenever we met them, their friendship has been returned. Distance 28 miles.

Bryant follows the above statement with a table of distances from Independence, Missouri, to Sutter's Fort. The distance between the two places he gives as 2091 miles. In all to reach San Francisco by way of San Jose the nine men travelled 2291 miles.