

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Early California Pantaloons

It might be interesting today to tell our readers a bit about the homes and their interior furnishings in the early 1840s, as Edwin Bryant describes them in "What I Saw in California," published in 1848. Having letters of introduction to both General Vallejo and Jacob Leese, residing in Sonora, Bryant delivered them soon after his arrival in California.

He related in his diary on October 15, 1846, that General Vallejo was a native Californian, and a man of intelligence and taste far superior to most of his countrymen. The interior of his house presented a different appearance to his eastern guest from any house occupied by native Californians, than he had previously seen since entering the country.

Every apartment, Bryant wrote, even the main entrance hall and corridors, were scrupulously clean, and presented an air of comfort which he had not seen elsewhere in California. The parlor he described, as furnished with handsome chairs, sofas, mirrors, and tables of mahogany framework and a fine piano, the first he had seen in the country. Several paintings and some superior engravings ornamented the walls.

Bryant's description of Senora Vallejo was very flattering. He wrote that she was a lady of charming personal appearance, and that she possessed in the highest degree that natural grace, ease, and warmth of manner which renders Spanish ladies so attractive and fascinating to the stranger.

The children of Senor and Senora Vallejo, six in number, were all beautiful and interesting, according to Bryant's account.

The same afternoon in 1846 Bryant and his party visited the house of Jacob Leese, which was also furnished in American style, according to his diary notation. Leese was described as the proprietor of a vineyard in the vicinity of Sonoma and they regaled upon grapes, as luscious as any the party had ever tasted.

The evening of the same day Bryant and his men had the pleasure of meeting "Thomas O. Larkin, Esq., last United States Consul for California". He had traveled by land from San Francisco to Sonora that day. The diary continued: "Mr. L. resides in Monterey, but I had had the pleasure of an introduction to him in San Francisco.

Mr. L. is a native of Boston and has been a resident of California for about 15 years, during which time he has amassed a large fortune, and from the changes now taking place, he is rapidly increasing it. He will probably be the first American millionaire in California."

When Bryant's pantaloons began to wear he searched for a piece of woolen cloth to make another pair. He succeeded, after searching through all the shops he saw, in procuring some black cotton velvet, for four yards of which he paid the sum of \$12. In the United States, he recalled the same article would probably have cost \$1.50. For four dollars more he succeeded in getting the pantaloons made by an American tailor, who had entered the country with General Kearney's forces.

To account for the fast traveling on horseback in California, Bryant found it necessary to explain the mode by which it is accomplished. A gentleman who started upon a journey of one hundred miles, and wished to perform the trip in a day would take with him, ten fresh horses and a vaquero. The eight loose horses were placed under the charge of the vaquero, and were driven in front, at the rate of ten to twelve miles an hour, according to the speed that was required for the journey.

At the end of 20 miles, the horses which had been mounted were discharged and turned into the caballada (group of horses), and the horses which had not been ridden and had been without weight, were saddled and mounted and rode at the same speed, and so on to the end of the journey. If a horse gave out he was left at the side of the road. The owner's brand was on him and if of any value, he was easily recovered. Horseflesh was cheap and the animal was made to go as long as he could.