

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 28, 1952

### **Dutch John Beset by Bandits**

"Late this evening received word that the stage has been robbed by highwaymen down at the first crossing this side of Cornwells."

So begins an excerpt, dated April 20, 1872, from the diary of J. Warren Matthews, an early settler in the Bitterwater Valley in San Benito County. The original diary, book by book, has been loaned to Victor Mossop of Monterey by a member of the Matthews family and Mr. Mossop has very kindly allowed us to enjoy its contents from time to time.

This true story of a stage robbery, and the capture of the bandit continues as follows.

"It seems Dutch John of Hernandes Valley was just ahead of the stage. John was driving a four horse team. The robbers made him 'lye' down on his face while they tied his hands behind him and took what money he had. Here they compelled him 'lye' until the stage came up. Chick Billings and Doc. Garner were on the stage. They served Chick and Doc Billings as they did the Dutchman, but they made Doc break open trunks, valises and cut open mail bag. Of course this was very repugnant to Doc's feelings, but they enforced their orders by keeping a revolver presented at his head. They got a gold watch from Billings which he valued very highly as it had been a present from his father.

"Upon leaving them, the robbers proceeded down the road to Edings, where they bound young Edings and George Saul, and got two dollars from the former. Saul they did not examine but cursed him, telling him he was not worth going through.

"Just below Swopes they encountered Upton Matthis and old man Pierce and they tied them as they had done all the others. From Upton they got \$784. Pierce they did not examine.

"Very great excitement prevails on the river tonight. A number of threats have been expressed against Joe Castro for they think he is at the bottom of the affair. It seems Joe was in Hollister yesterday and was around with Garner and Upton, and asked Doc two or three times if he was coming up and was told each time that he was coming up in three or four days. Doc says Joe, knew he had two hundred dollars with him. Next morning Joe was off up the San Benito before the stage

started, and rode so hard that his horse gave out about the time he got in Cornwells, where he left him and hurried on foot, passing Dutch John but a short time and distance below where the latter was stopped by robbers.

"When the stage reached Castro's they found Joe digging post holes. This looked suspicious for Joe is very lazy. Upton says that while robbing him one of their mask fell off and that he knew the 'greaser,' and that he had been stopping at Joe's some time past. Altogether circumstantial evidence is strong against Castro.

"Our meeting of the Improvement Society was not so well attended or the exercises quite so interesting as usual owing to an extent to the excited state of the public mind."

(More on Monday)